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MANY MOODS

MANY MOODS

A VOLUME OF VERSE

BY

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

AUTHOR OF 'RENAISSANCE IN ITALY' 'STUDIES OF THE GREEK POETS' ETC.

'The song is to the singer, and comes back most to him'

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1878

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TO

THE HON. RODEN NOEL.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

From many poems in manuscript I have chosen enough to make the volume I dedicate to you. It has always seemed to me that there are some thoughts which a writer, who dares not claim the sacred name of poet, may express better in rhyme and metre than in prose, and that the verses so produced have a certain value. This is my excuse for the present publication. I have, however, a deeper and more personal motive. Condemned by ill health to long exile, and deprived of the resource of serious study, I wish to gather up the fragments that remain from stronger and it may be happier periods of life, in order that some moods of thought and feeling, not elsewhere expressed by me in print, may live within the memory of men like you, as part of me.

I have tried to preserve a certain unity of tone by restricting myself mainly to the themes of Love, Friendship, Death, and Sleep. For the same reason I have given the preference to metres adopted from the Italian—to terza rima,

the octave stanza, the sonnet, and rime royal based upon the Florentine Ballata.

Such as are these poems, written at different times and under very varied conditions during the last fifteen years, I now offer them to you, in token of a friendship founded upon sympathies of no common strength or quality. You who are poet, metaphysician, and critic, will not overrate them; though I dare flatter myself that your kindness will greet them in words like these:

> Had my friend's Muse grown with this growing age,
> A dearer birth than this his love had brought,
> To march in ranks of better equipage.

I am yours ever,

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

DAVOS PLATZ: *April* 2, 1878.

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PICTURES OF TRAVEL.

SOUTHWARD BOUND.

Dear friend, you leave our chary northern clime,
  Now that the daylight's waning, and the leaf
Hangs sere on chestnut bough, and beech, and lime;
  The husbandman has garnered every sheaf;
  Pale autumn leads us to the lingering grief
Of melancholy winter; while you fly
On summer's swallow-wing to Italy.

Great cities, greater in decay and death,
  Dream-like with immemorial repose,
Whose ruins like a shrine for ever sheathe
  The mighty names and memories of those
  Who lived and died to die no more, shall close
Your happy pilgrimage; and you shall learn,
Breathing their ancient air, the thoughts that burn

For ever in the hearts of after men:—
  Yea, from the very soil of silent Rome
You shall grow wise; and, walking, live again
  The lives of buried peoples, and become
  A child by right of that eternal home,
Cradle and grave of empires, on whose walls
The sun himself subdued to reverence falls.

O solemn aisles! O vast and sacred shade!
Ruins on ruins heaped! Imperial state
With rubbish of wrecked centuries o'erlaid!
There Christ in Phœbus' shrine is consecrate;
Titles of pope and priest surmount the gate
Where Cæsar's legions trampled: yet in vain
Age strives with age; for still the old gods reign:

Pale gods in cere-cloths, ghosts of bye-gone Greece,
Rule in their marble sepulchres: the halls,
Through which we pass, with dead divinities
Are gleaming; and the voice of Hellas calls
Clear from her grave: nought but the pedestals
Belong to Christ: the carven shapes above
Still breathe and smile with life of ancient Love.

You shall see Naples and the orange groves
Deep-set of cool Sorrento, green and gold
Mingling their lustre by calm azure coves,
Or like the fabled dragon fold on fold
Curled in the trough of cloven hills, or rolled
Down vales Hesperian, through dim caverned shades
Of palace porches and lone colonnades:

Capri, the perfect island—boys and girls
Free as spring-flowers, straight, fair, and musical
Of movement; in whose eyes and clustering curls
The youth of Greece still lingers; whose feet fall
Like kisses on green turf by cypress tall
And pine-tree shadowed; who, unknowing care,
Draw love and laughter from the innocent air:

Ravenna in her widowhood—the waste
  Where dreams a withered ocean ; where the hand
Of time has gently played with tombs defaced
  Of priest and emperor ; where the temples stand,
  Proud in decay, in desolation grand,—
Solemn and sad like clouds that lingeringly
Sail, and are loth to fade upon the sky :

Siena, Bride of Solitude, whose eyes
  Are lifted o'er the russet hills to scan
Immeasurable tracts of limpid skies,
  Arching those silent sullen plains where man
  Fades like a weed mid mouldering marshes wan ;
Where cane and pine and cypress, poison-proof,
For death and fever spread their stately roof.

There shall you tread the home of humble prayer,
  Where she who was of love a very flame,
First drew the perfume of Italian air ;
  Then flowering into womanhood became
  Fair spouse of Christ, elect to purge the shame
Of Babylon from Rome, and build once more
God's temple on the sacred Latian shore.

Thence where the Paglia mid wind-withered brakes
  Rolls Tiberward upon his waste of sand,
Ascend the solitary rock that slakes
  Its thirst with thunder in a barren land ;
  Beneath those awful arches you shall stand
Where Luca, Michael's morning star, hath set
Signs of the doom no sinner may forget.

You shall see Florence, the flower-citadel
  Of freedom, when resurgent Italy
First mid her sister-nations broke the spell
  Of sloth and fear that bound humanity,
  Raising the spirit of live poetry
From buried Hellas, and once more began
With music to rebuild the shrines of man.

You shall see Venice—glide as though in dreams
  Midmost a hollowed opal; for her sky,
Mirrored upon the ocean-pavement, seems
  At dawn and eve to build in vacancy
  A wondrous bubble-dome of wizardry,
Suspended where the light, all ways alike
Circumfluent, upon her sphere may strike.

About your feet the myrtles will be set,
  Grey rosemary and thyme, and tender blue
Of love-pale labyrinthine violet;
  Flame-born anemones will glitter through
  Dark aisles of roofing pine-trees; and for you
The golden jonquil and starred asphodel
And hyacinth their speechless tales will tell.

The nightingales for you their tremulous song
  Shall pour amid the snowy scented bloom
Of wild acacia bowers, and all night long
  Through starlight-flooded spheres of purple gloom
  Still lemon boughs shall spread their faint perfume,
Soothing your sense with odours sweet as sleep,
While wind-stirred cypresses low music keep.

For you the mountain Generous shall yield
  His wealth of blossoms in the noon of May—
Fire-balls of peonies, and pearls concealed
  Of lilies in thick leafage, glittering spray
  Of pendulous laburnum boughs, that sway
To scarce-felt breezes, gilding far and wide
With liquid amber all the broad hill-side.

Yea, and what time the morning mists are furled
  On lake low-lying and prodigious plain,
And on the western sky the massy world
  Contracts her shadow—for the sunbeams gain
  Unseen yet growing—while the awful train
Of cloudless Alps stand garish, mute and chill,
Waiting the sun's kiss with pale forehead still—

You from his crest shall see the sudden fire
  Flash joyous: lo, the solitary snow
First blushing! Broader now, brighter and higher,
  Shoots the strong ray; the mountains row by row
  Receive it, and the purple valleys glow;
The smooth lake-mirrors laugh; till silently
Throbs with full light and life the jocund sky!

Farewell: you pass; we tarry: yet for us
  Is the long weary penitential way
Of thought that souls must travel, dubious,
  With tottering steps and eyes that wane away
  'Neath brows more wrinkle-withered day by day.
Farewell! There is no rest except in death
For him who stays or him who journeyeth.

ON THE RIVIERA.

A FRAGMENT.

There is a hillside convent poised aloft
Between bare mountains and grey olive trees;
Where many a grassy knoll and orchard croft

Gaze o'er the low land to sky-kissing seas,
Half drowned in dreamy cloud-wreaths opaline.
How bleached as bone are those gaunt terraces

Of circling hills! how hoary as the brine
Of billows are the valley-slopes below,
When sunbeams on slant branch and berry shine,

Or breezes, wet and wayward, row by row
One way blow all the bending boughs, and white
Shimmer the nether leaves like dusted snow!—

There round the convent wall the grass is bright
In spring-time with peach-flowers and apricot,
Each tree well planted, shooting to the light

Like Joseph's rod with leaf and lusty knot
Of crowning blossoms; and a stream doth flow
Between grey boles of chestnut trees that blot

The flowery thorp with shadows. Soft and slow
Fly all the feet of weeks and months and years
In this still home of peace; and none doth know,

Here growing old, what billows of strange fears,
What hopes and cares and joys shake hearts that beat
Far in the world forgotten. On grave ears

And musing brain no harsh noise falls, but sweet
Sound of recurring bells and choiring boys,
Singing loud hymns of praise in season meet.

Down from the hills divine the silver voice
Of streams mid pine-woods calling all day long,
And from the fields beneath the rustic joys

Of shepherds cadenced in an antique song
Rising, scarce stir the silence. They who walk
The tall tree-heaths and myrtle-rods among,

With eyes down-cast snapping the daisy stalk,
Or bruising with bare feet the fragrant thyme,
May still the live-long day with angels talk

In those great whispering-galleries sublime
Of God, the stars o'erarch, the mountains span.
Or if one choose some topmost peak to climb,

And rest where yet perchance no foot of man
Trod, but the rain of heaven and nightly dew
Lay virgin lips, he clothed in rough serge wan,

Matching his grey couch with the selfsame hue,
May kneel unmoving in impassioned prayer;
Till haply on his swooning sense the blue

Rends with fierce lightning-flash and thunder-blare
Of seraph wings innumerous, or a choir
Of saints down swooping mid their cohort bear

Symbols and signs ringed round with living fire:—
Those wounds divine, those yearning dying eyes
Pierce, scorch, blind, shrivel with extreme desire;

Yea, and a voice thrills—Lo, in Paradise
Shalt thou be with me!—Then the world reels round,
And stretching vain arms toward the angry skies

Of sunset barred with black, upon the ground
Falls with excess of bliss the blinded seer:
Beneath his feet the solemn earth is wound

In twilight; the lone swallow without fear
Lights at his side, and chirps, and plumes her wing
Unstirred, for still he stirs not: till when sphere

By sphere the stars their steady splendour fling,
And night sails forth, he from his trance divine
Awaking with wild hope and wondering,—

As in a dream along the giddy line
Of sloping roofs men wander,—back will wend
By crag and scaur and twisted root of pine.

Such guerdon hath been granted, if we lend
Faith to old legends, unto eyes grown grey
With contemplation through weird hours that blend

The inner and the outer light.—But they
Who see not visions, yet are monks, how well
In this hill-convent glides for them the day!

For are there not for old men beads to tell
With whispered Aves in the winter sun;
Cool aisles in summer; missal leaves to fill

With quaint flower-fretwork; written scrolls whereon
To ponder, pressing from parched sentences
Sweet wine of truth by meditation?

Then for the younger stretch broad terraces,
Scooped from the mountain side, to sow with corn;
Fair orchards fat with blossoming fruit-trees

To till and tend; to quell the stubborn thorn;
In trimset gardens from the grove or field
To plant spring-flowers faint-coloured like the morn;

Fir-boughs to cut, fir-cones to store, and shield
The wattled sheepcote with dry lentisk-leaves;
To press the honey that the brown bees yield;

To stack the goodly gold of autumn's sheaves;—
In no wise to be idle, but to do
Daily as one who for his Master weaves

A perfect robe of state, the which, although
He toil for years, may never finished be,
Albeit the work be worthy judged e'en so.

THE SHEPHERD TO THE EVENING STAR.

Star of my soul, arise;
  Shew forth thy silver shining!
For thee the sunset skies
  With love and light are pining:
The tents of evening spread for thee
Their rich and radiant canopy.

All day the tender lemon trees
  Above the pathway bending
Drooped their still boughs in odorous ease
  Thine advent cool attending:
But now the little winds that blow
Sway their faint petals to and fro.

The dim mysterious avenues
  Of olives interwoven
Respire again, and drink the dews;
  And where their skirts are cloven,
Black funeral flames of cypresses
Shoot skyward from the purple seas.

My sheep and goats are housed : their bells
  Keep silence on the meadow ;
And solitude hath spread the fells
  With her aërial shadow :
I scarce can hear a sound, or see
A single thing to hinder thee.

Come, star ! Come, lover ! Let me feel
  The wonder of thy kisses :
Breathe in my brain the thoughts that steal
  Through heaven's blue wildernesses :
But when the maiden moon is free,
Leave me to sleep and dream of thee !

IN THE MENTONE GRAVEYARD.

Between the circling mountains and the sea
  Rest thou.—Pure spirit, spirit whose work is done,
Here to the earth whate'er was left of thee
  Mortal, we render. But beyond the sun
  And utmost stars, who knows what life begun
Even now, nor ever to be ended, bright
With clearest effluence of unclouded light,

Greets thee undazzled ?—Lo ! this place of tombs
  With rose-wreaths and with clematis and vine,
And violets that smile in winter, blooms :

Sun, moon, and stars in sweet procession shine
Above thy shadeless grave: the waves divine
Gleam like a silver shield beneath; the bare
Broad hills o'erhead, defining the free air,

Enclose a temple of the sheltering skies
To roof thee. Noon and eve and lustrous night,
The sunset thou didst love, the strong sunrise
That filled thy soul erewhile with strange delight,
Still on thy sleeping clay shed kisses bright;
But thou—oh, not for thee these waning powers
Of morn and evening, these poor paling flowers,

These narrowing limits of sea, sky, and earth!
For in thy tombless city of the dead
Sunrising and sunsetting, and the mirth
Of springtime and of summer, and our red
Rose-wreaths are swallowed in the streams that spread
Supreme of Light ineffable from Him,
Matched with whose least of rays our sun is dim.

Oh, blest! It is for us not thee we grieve!
Yet even so, ye voices, and you tide
Of souls innumerous that panting heave
To rhythmic pulses of God's heart, and hide
Beneath your myriad booming breakers wide
The universal Life invisible,
Give praise! Behold, the void that was so still

Breaks into singing, and the desert cries—
  Praise, praise to Thee! praise for Thy servant Death,
The healer and deliverer! from his eyes
  Flows life that cannot die; yea, with his breath
  The dross of weary earth he winnoweth,
Leaving all pure and perfect things to be
Merged in the soul of Thine immensity!

Praise, Lord, yea praise for this our brother Death!
  Though also for the fair mysterious veil
Of life that from Thy radiance severeth
  Our mortal sight, for these faint blossoms frail
  Of joy on earth we cherish, for the pale
Light of the circling years, we praise Thee too :—
Since thus as in a web Thy spirit through

The phantom world is woven :—Yet thrice praise
  For him who frees us! Surely we shall gain,
As guerdon for the exile of these days,
  Oneness with Thee; and as the drops of rain,
  Cast from the sobbing cloud in summer's pain,
Resume their rest in ocean, even so we,
Lost for a while, shall find ourselves in Thee.

FOR ONE OF GIAN BELLINI'S LITTLE ANGELS.

My task it is to stand beneath the throne,
To stand and wait, while those grave presences,
Prophet and priest and saint and seraph, zone
Our Lady with the Child upon her knees:
They from mild lips receive the messages
Of peace and love, which thence to men below
They shower soft-falling like pure flakes of snow.

I meanwhile wait; and very mute must be
My music, lest I break the golden trance
Of bliss celestial, or with childish glee
Trouble the fount of divine utterance.
Yet when those lips are tired of speech, perchance
It may be that the royal babe will lie
And slumber to my whispered lullaby:

Then all those mighty brows will rest, and peace
Descend like dew on that high company.
Therefore I stand and wait, but do not cease
To clasp my lute, that silver melody,
When our dear Lady bends her smile on me,
Forth from my throat and from these thrilling strings
Dove-like may soar and spread ethereal wings.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS.

Monotonously grey the skies
  Westward with hues of rose are barred :
Beneath, the desert landscape lies
  Embrowned with crusted scurf and shard
  Of salt-flakes, flinty like the hard
Heart of a man long dead to good,
Who festers in his solitude.

No life, where life hath been ; for foul
  And ragged on the roof the thatch
Still hangs in tatters, like the cowl
  That hoods a skull ; the rusty latch
  Creaks on the door ; and many a patch,
Leprous upon the walls within,
Perpetuates the slime of sin.

But who are these? No lords, I ween,
  Of this loathed place. How like a god,
With kingly eyes and brows serene,
  Is He, whose bleeding feet unshod
  The ghastly wilderness have trod :
How tranquilly upon the stone
That squares the porch, he makes his throne.

Before him kneels a suppliant, lifts
  Strong arms—yet not with hands that pray,
Or adoration, or with gifts :
  Woman or man? Who knows? The grey
  Serge from the navel falls away,
Leaving all bare—breast, throat, and arms
Snowy with snake-enwoven charms.

The forehead pleads not, but commands :
  The Bacchic bosom heaves with pride :
Above the elbows, bright as brands,
  Armlets, embossed, on either side,
  Enhance the lustre that they hide—
The dazzling skin, the flesh that burns
Like fire in alabaster urns.

Upraised in those broad palms are stones,
  Torn from the pavement, cold and dead,
Thrust forth in scorn to match the tones
  From lips voluptuously red
  Hissing: 'O God! make these stones bread!
He answers from his barren throne :
'Man shall not live by bread alone.'

AN EPISODE.

Vasari tells that Luca Signorelli,
The morning star of Michael Angelo,
Had but one son, a youth of seventeen summers,
Who died. That day the master at his easel
Wielded the liberal brush wherewith he painted
At Orvieto, on the Duomo's walls,
Stern forms of Death and Heaven and Hell and Judgment.
Then came they to him, cried: 'Thy son is dead,
Slain in a duel; but the bloom of life
Yet lingers round red lips and downy cheek.'
Luca spoke not, but listened. Next they bore
His dead son to the silent painting-room,
And left on tiptoe son and sire alone.
Still Luca spoke and groaned not; but he raised
The wonderful dead youth, and smoothed his hair,
Washed his red wounds, and laid him on a bed,
Naked and beautiful, where rosy curtains
Shed a soft glimmer of uncertain splendour
Life-like upon the marble limbs below.
Then Luca seized his palette: hour by hour
Silence was in the room; none durst approach:
Morn wore to noon, and noon to eve, when shyly
A little maid peeped in, and saw the painter
Painting his dead son with unerring hand-stroke,
Firm and dry-eyed before the lordly canvas.

THE GENIUS OF THE VATICAN.

When through the silent galleries of the brain
I stray revolving memories sweet and strange,
In that wide realm removed from chance and change
Where each unto himself alone doth reign ;
I visit mountains, woods, and lilied lawns,
Hoar caves of ocean, towers, and cities old,
Shadow and sunshine, stars in vapour rolled,
Dim moons, and blood-shot eyes of angry dawns ;—
Terror and Beauty, life-like tapestry
Woven by fancy on the warp of thought ;—
Till from the whirl of shifting phantoms caught,
One form grows clear : my spirit leans to thee
With yearning, Love long lost, Uranian,
Dream of immortal youth revealed to mortal man !

Though rude barbarian hands and envious age
Have marred thy radiance, making thee, like us,
Jangled and broken music; yet even thus
Thou art a glimpse of Beauty, like some page
Of Sappho's heart's lament preserved alone
Mid wreck and ruin, or an angel borne
Sole over vapoury mountain slopes. Forlorn
And bare, yet is thy deathless spirit shewn ;

And we by wings of fancy may ascend,
  And see thee in thy sphere, and dream of thee,
  As subtlest power of juvenility,
Instinct in all things, able to descend
  Into the womb of earth and stir the seed,
  Or mount the skies fresh suns and stars to breed.

Nathless it grieves me that thy pensive mood
  And downcast eyes and melancholy brow
  Reveal such sorrow; nay, I know not how
Stern sadness o'er thy beauty dares to brood.
And then I say; the sorrow is not thine,
  But his who sculptured thee, weeping to think
  That earthly suns to night's cold tide must sink,
And youth ere long in death's pale charnel pine.
Or wert thou some Marcellus shown by heaven
  With presage of the tomb upon thine eyes,
  Whom Jove, too envious of our clouded skies,
Snatched from the earth, to divine councils given,
  And smoothed thy brow, and raised thy drooping head,
  And lapped thee in a soft Elysian bed?

There thou at endless feast forgetful liest,
  Where Ganymede and Hebe brim the wine,
  And mystic Hours their veilèd dances twine,
And to soft songs of whispered love thou sighest—
Not as on earth the sons of women sigh
  For sadness of their insignificance—
  But stirred by passion's pain, that loves to glance
Side-long at sorrow, lest eternity,

Too full of sweets, like bowls of œnomel,
Should sate thine appetite, and endless youth,
A curse instead of blessing, move the ruth
Of Fate thy thread to sever with a spell.
So even in heaven thou art the same as he
Who carved thy human form, imagined thee.

Still as I gaze, 'Sad spirit, come away!'
Thy mute meek lips most eloquently urge:
'Why thus life's music in sad wailings merge,
And dim with tearful toil youth's opening day?
Oh, come away! Some woodland we will seek,
And lie together by the stream, and twine
Rare flowers to wreathe our hair, and drink the wine
Distilled from berries. There the day shall break
With sunshine o'er us; Hesper silently
Lead forth the silver stars that dance in heaven;
And thou shalt learn what depth of joy is given
To lips divine, immortal minstrelsy;
Till books and schools and courts and honours seem
The far-off echo of a sick man's dream.'

I will arise and come to thee. The juice
Of gravest herbs, poppy and pale henbane,
Shall bead my forehead and confuse my brain
With fierce intoxication, life's long truce.
Too true there is no road from hence but Death;
And that perchance to Nothing: yet blank nought
Were better than the anguish of such thought
As we draw daily with our deepest breath.

I know not what compels me; but thy form
Still beckons; and I hear a voice that says:
'Pass forth; for ever flow the lengthening days;
For ever swells the elemental storm;
And thou art nothing; lay thee on the knees
Of Doom, and take thine everlasting ease.'

Vain, ah, how vain! The dull and dusty tomb
Is not more cold and silent than those lips:
We dream a dream; away the vision slips,
And leaves us grasping at the empty gloom.
The voice I heard, the melancholy brow,
The sweet soul beaconing from the steadfast eyes,
Have vanished; and the marble statue lies
Perfect and pale and disenchanted now.
We live our little lives, then fall away;
We fight and laugh and love and pray and moan;
While thou, thought-frozen in memorial stone,
Art still the same; thy charms do not decay:
Thousands shall dote on thee when I am dead,
And thou inanimate still hang thy pensive head.

THE CORPSE OF JULIA.

Four hundred years ago, so runs the myth,
Hard by Cæcilia's resting-place in Rome,
Some Lombard strangers, men with spade and scythe,

Pickaxe and shovel, through a vaulted dome
Deep-sunken in the earth smote suddenly;
Then gazed in wonder at a silent tomb.

The spacious roof with frailest tracery
Of forms divine embossed, the walls with dyes
Of flower-like frescoes were so strange to see,

That those rude men staring with startled eyes
Expected thunder, when with sudden wrath
The sleeping spirit of the place should rise,

And all the magic marvel melt in froth.
Still nothing stirred, save that across a beam
Of slanting sunlight whirred a drowsy moth.

Long time they stayed like men who waking dream;
Then he whose heart was stoutest, dared to cry,
'Come forth, O ye who slumber, to the gleam

'Of wholesome day! Far better 'tis to die
After short life and sweet, than thus enshrined
In darkness everlastingly to lie!'

Still none arose or answered; but the wind
Shaking the dry Campagna grasses, made
Fit music for a melancholy mind.

Then cautiously with crowbar and with spade
They delved a wider entrance, one by one
Descending breathless to the nether shade.

A tripod wrought of bronze, with bread thereon
Coal-black and cindery in a silver urn,
Some cups of clay baked 'neath a southern sun,

A lamp whose wick had long since ceased to burn;
Such simple furniture those craftsmen found,
Hard by a marble chest with figures stern

Of gods and carved acanthus-garlands crowned.—
There in the midst Prometheus moulded man
Of plastic mire, while Clotho spinning wound

The thread of fate that with his breath began;
Above, sublime Urania traced the sphere
Whereon was charactered his vital span:

On one side went the Morning, starry-clear,
With steeds that scatter daylight through the sky;
And Love the torch-bearer was stationed near:

But on the other, Death, that may not die,
Drooped his furled wings beneath the dragon car
Of Night down-thundering from her throne on high:

And there was Pallas, queen of wit and war;
And Kupris, with the smile that all obey;
And Hermes, whom the soul must follow far

Through darkness on the solitary way:
Here Psyche spread her wings when life was young;
Here fluttered loth to leave the lips of clay.—

Thus birth and death by ancient poets sung,
And love and wisdom and the voice of doom,
Spake through the marble with a speechless tongue;

Whereof those men heard nothing, for the tomb,
Through thirteen centuries withdrawn from day,
Was not so murky as their mental gloom.

Nor could they read the legend—'Julia,
Daughter of Claudius'—with rich gold o'erlaid
Upon the closed lid, where dead laurels lay.

Nathless desire possessed them to invade
The sanctity of sepulture, and wrest
Its heaped-up treasure from the guardian shade.

But first they crossed themselves, brow, shoulder, breast;
And kneeling, muttered Ave; then at ease,
With hands well skilled to sunder, clove the chest.

What found they there? Of gems and necklaces,
Wrought gold and raiment, story nothing saith:
They perished with the men who sought for these.

But of a treasure-trove beyond all faith
Incredible, an ever-blooming flower
Plucked from the fingers of relentless death,

Hear now the mystery.—Sleeping in her bower
Of sculptured marble lay a maid more fair
Than Helen lured to love in evil hour.

Around her cheeks and brows the unruffled hair
Rippling in living gold, adown her throat
And breathing breast was woven like a snare;

Her open lips, whence laughter seemed to float
And marry with the music of her eyes,
Were red as roses; death and darkness wrote

No legend on her cheeks of youth that dies,
But round and ripening like a peach in June
They blushed beneath the unfamiliar skies.

This then was Julia. The wild story soon
Through Rome was bruited—how that on the way
Named Appian, guarded by a magic rune,

A girl in all the flower of beauty lay,
Shrouded from sun and stars by walls whereon
Pictures were painted brighter than the day.

Then those who heard, went forth to gaze upon
The wonder, and the marvel greater grew;
For man to man cried, 'Never sun hath shone

'On face of maid more beauteous, never hue
Of health on lips more ruddy, lovelier braid
Of hair divinely woven met the view!'

Next from the city gates in mail arrayed
Went senator and captain; priest and pope;
Grey-bearded counsellor and winsome maid.

On cuirass and on kirtle, cape and cope,
Fierce smote the sunrise; and a song of May
Thrilled the strong heart of youth with love and hope.

Monks mumbled psalms, and fools with baubles gay
Fleshed their blunt shafts of wit on dwarfs that ran,
Mis-shapen, shambling down the dusty way.

Past broken arch, past walls Aurelian,
'Twixt tomb and tomb, the selfsame stones they trod
As when in pomp triumphal rode the van

Of Rome with all her chiefs to greet the god
On Alba's hill, high Latiarian Jove.
Midway those motley pilgrims by the sod

Where Julia slumbered in her bright alcove,
Halted upon the margin of the tomb.
With wheels and ropes, pulleys and planks, they strove

To lift her marble coffin; and the gloom
Yielded at length his treasure. Up she rose
Smiling and radiant from death's silent womb,

Like dayspring when the orient gates unclose
And all the dancing stars dissolve and die.—
None breathed, none stirred, while wafted like a rose

Or lily in her cradle, far on high,
Clasped by the creaking crane, she glidingly
Moved to the catafalque where she must lie.

Six oxen of Clitumnus, fair to see
With sunbright aster garlands, drew the wain,
Trailing rich silks and wrought embroidery,

The gifts of Roman ladies. Then the strain
Ceased, and the people shouted—'Julia
Daughter of Claudius enters Rome again!'

Adown the Forum, down the Sacred Way,
With music and with dancing was she borne,
Till in the Capitol at last she lay.

Then week by week from morn to dewy morn
Folk thronged to worship Julia: prayers were said
And offerings laid upon her marble urn:

Until one day at dawn they sought the maid,
And found instead only an open tomb.
Julia at length was numbered with the dead.—

Thus far the legend, told by one to whom
Fair credence may be yielded, one who heard,
Saw, read, and noted, all that passed in Rome.

But we who pierce beyond the written word,
What make we of the marvel?—Sleeping lay
The soul of ancient loveliness unstirred

Through twice five centuries. Death and decay
Passed by, nor touched her. Till the moment came
When rude unlettered men released the fay.

Then she arose, a phœnix from the flame,
To live new life, be worshipped, cease to be,
Yet fade not ere the old and new became

One world beneath her powerful empery.—
Of this real resurrection from the tomb
The tale of buried Julia is for me

A parable.—Thus Hellas from the gloom,
Radiant with beauty's immortality,
Shone forth and bade the soul of man be free.

IN THE SYRACUSAN STONE-QUARRIES.

Day wakes again: the dull and leaden dawn
Walks breathless on the verge of the hot sky:
And misery wakens: but oh, never more
Shall these dear eyelids open, never more
These lips give back the word of love to mine.

One hour; and then the surly taskmaster
Will drag thee hence, and me, more wretched, drive
Forth to day-labour on the glittering crags:
Nay, better thou in death than toiling thus—
Thou a freeborn Athenian, in whose veins
Mingled the sacred ichor of the gods,
Twentieth in descent from Ion's seed!

O god-like limbs! How beautiful in slumber,
Though wounded, stained, and bruised with servile toil!
Not as when first I saw them bared for play
In the Lyceum, and I felt a fire
Leap through thine eyes to mine—no wanton heat
Such as some use, but that clear light of love
Which the old man divine instructed us
Would breed all noble thought and strength of soul.
Yea, but we grew together like twin gods,
Made mighty by the force of married wills,
Pure by true love unselfish, dutiful
By wise obedience to unsensual laws.
Then, when the trumpets blew, that solemn morn,
And Athens' pomp went forth to Sicily
Presaging triumph, old Ameinias stood
Between us, and he joined my hand with thine,
Saying: 'Take him; yea, take my only son;
And let your love, once watched with jealous fear,
Now honoured, be his charm from every foe.
Come not alone again to meet my curse.'

How can I bear the old man's angry eyes?
Yet have I not watched over thee, my star,
Whose light at morn and evening made me live,
Through long dark days on unfamiliar shores?
The tossing sea, the inhospitable sands,
The blood-stained trenches of Epipolæ,
Know how I loved thee: in the flight I bore
Thee wounded on my shield—here is the wound,

Healed now, alas! in vain. Would we had died
Together mid red waves and trampled reeds
When swoln Asinarus ran down with blood!

But this I swear: no second night shall find
Me living, lingering out my widowed hours,
A slave, without thy sacred soul to shield!
For though our swords lie rusting on the shrine
Of some accurséd Syracusan queen,
Some proud implacable Heré, there are rocks,
Wedges, and ropes, and hammers: these the foe
Yield for slave's labour; but a freeman's hand
Shall make them carve a way for the free will.
Death hath a thousand portals.
Hail, my love!
I come; the hour has sounded; wait for me!
Even now the sun is climbing the steep wave;
And ere he reach his zenith, we shall dwell
Together in the sphere of happier souls.

EVENING AT PALERMO.

Now night descends with darkness: summer swoons
Through the wide temples of the windless sky;
And on the mirrors of the waves, like moons,
The breathing stars dilated languid lie:
How cool to throbbing pulse and heated eye

Are those smooth silver curves that round the bay
Upon their sandy margent rest from play!

How sweet it were on this mysterious night
  Of pulsing stars and splendours, from the shore
Knee-deep to wade, and from the ripples bright
  To brush the phosphorescent foam-flowers hoar;
  Then with broad breast to cleave the watery floor,
And floating, dreaming, through the sphere to swim
Of silvery skies and silvery billows dim!

What if the waves of dreamless Death, like these,
  Should soothe our senses aching with the shine
Of Life's long radiance? O primeval ease,
  That wast and art and art to be divine,
  Thou shalt receive into the crystalline
Silence of thy sleep-silvered healing sea
These souls o'erburdened with mortality!

THE HÊRÔON OF PHILIPPUS.

The shrine is ruined now; and far away
To East and West stretch olive-groves, whose shade
Even at the height of summer noon is grey.

Asphodels sprout upon the plinth decayed
Of these low columns, and the snake hath found
Her haunt 'neath altar-steps with weeds o'erlaid.

Yet this was once a hero's temple, crowned
With myrtle boughs by lovers, and with palm
By wrestlers ; resonant with sweetest sound

Of flute and fife in summer evening's calm ;
And odorous with incense all the year,
With nard and spice and galbanum and balm.

Philippus was the hero's name. Nay, hear
His story. From no legend shalt thou learn
More of the sooth that loving men hold dear.

Lie then and listen fanned with feathery fern.—
In ancient days a fight in yonder dell
Was fought, and warriors bled, and many an urn

Was filled with frail grey dust of those that fell :
But one there was of whom no brazen vase
Seemed worthy ; for his form, as poets tell,

Found mid the slain was godlike : summer haze
Sun-smitten were the clustering curls around
His marble forehead ; and the pearly rays

Of moonbeams are too pale for the profound
Slumber of snow that soothed his ivory breast.
In the forefront of battle was he found,

With broken sword and blood-bedabbled crest.
Around him and beside him ridges ran
Of stiffening dead, whose clenchéd teeth expressed

The torment of their death-throes—brawny man
And beardless youth thick-garnered: but he lay
Smiling, and o'er his body statue-wan

Stretched a broad brazen shield; the miry clay,
This way and that down-trodden, held the rim
Of that strong targe; and gouts of gory spray

Bathed all its rondure, from each stricken limb
Spouting of one who clasped the youth, and flung
Death-frozen arms abroad to shelter him.

Philippus is our hero. But no tongue
Hath told that comrade's tale: his life was given
To shield the stainless corpse to which he clung;

What bliss were life if that loved form were riven
By dart or toothéd lance or hurrying heel?—
Which was the hero, say'st thou? Surely heaven

Hath room for both within her starry wheel:
But earthly fame speaks only of the face
And form of him, whose charm had power to steal

The souls of foemen. From that fearful place
They raised Philippus; bathed his brows with myrrh;
Clasped his cold breast with many a locked embrace;

Then built his funeral pyre of splintered fir,
And carved this temple. He became a god:
His comrade found a nameless sepulchre

There on the field beneath the trampled clod.
With feet of amorous men and maids this shrine
Thrilled soft through centuries: that turfy sod

Gives yearly pasture to the patient kine.
These aisles with violet wreaths were garlanded:
Wind-flowers and hyacinths in April shine

Over the sward where sank that lover's head.
For thus the gods ordain. Thus Beauty takes
Even hard eyes that scan the hostile dead.

But he who from Love's fiery fountain slakes
Undying thirst, thrice blest must be to lie
Lost in the blaze of loveliness that makes
A sun for stars to swoon in and to die.

LE JEUNE HOMME CARESSANT SA CHIMÈRE.

FOR AN INTAGLIO.

A boy of eighteen years mid myrtle-boughs
  Lying love-languid on a morn of May,
Watched half-asleep his goats insatiate browse
  Thin shoots of thyme and lentisk, by the spray
  Of biting sea-winds bitter made and grey:
Therewith when shadows fell, his waking thought
Of love into a wondrous dream was wrought.

A woman lay beside him,—so it seemed;
  For on her marble shoulders, like a mist
Irradiate with tawny moonrise, gleamed
  Thick silken tresses; her white woman's wrist,
  Glittering with snaky gold and amethyst,
Upheld a dainty chin; and there beneath,
Her twin breasts shone like pinks that lilies wreathe.

What colour were her eyes I cannot tell;
  For as he gazed thereon, at times they darted
Dun rays like water in a dusky well;
  Then turned to topaz: then like rubies smarted
  With smouldering flames of passion tiger-hearted;
Then 'neath blue-veinéd lids swam soft and tender
With pleadings and shy timorous surrender.

Thus far a woman: but the breath that lifted
  Her panting breast with long melodious sighs,
Stirred o'er her neck and hair broad wings that sifted
  The perfumes of meridian Paradise;
  Dusk were they, furred like velvet, gemmed with eyes
Of such dull lustre as in isles afar
Night-flying moths spread to the summer star.

Music these pinions made—a sound and surge
  Of pines innumerous near lisping waves—
Rustlings of reeds and rushes on the verge

Of level lakes and naiad-haunted caves—
Drowned whispers of a wandering stream that laves
Deep alder-boughs and tracts of ferny grass
Bordered with azure-belled campanulas.

Potent they were: for never since her birth
With feet of woman this fair siren pressed
Sleek meadow swards or stony ways of earth;
But neath the silken marvel of her breast,
Displayed in sinuous length of coil and crest,
Glittered a serpent's tail, fold over fold,
In massy labyrinths of languor rolled.

Ah me! what fascination! what faint stars
Of emerald and opal, with the shine
Of rubies intermingled, and dim bars
Of twisting turquoise and pale coralline!
What rings and rounds! what thin streaks sapphirine
Freckled that gleaming glory, like the bed
Of Eden streams with gems enamelléd!

There lurked no loathing, no soul-freezing fear,
But luxury and love these coils between:
Faint grew the boy; the siren filled his ear
With singing sweet as when the village green
Re-echoes to the tinkling tambourine,
And feet of girls aglow with laughter glance
In myriad mazy errors of the dance.

How long he dallied with delusive joy
I know not: but thereafter never more
The peace of passionless slumber soothed the boy;
For he was stricken to the very core
With sickness of desire exceeding sore,
And through the radiance of his eyes there shone
Consuming fire too fierce to gaze upon.

He, ere he died—and they whom lips divine
Have touched, fade flower-like and cease to be—
Bade Charicles on agate carve a sign
Of his strange slumber: therefore can we see
Here in the ruddy gem's transparency
The boy, the myrtle-boughs, the triple spell
Of moth and snake and white witch terrible.

THE ARVE TO THE RHONE.

From your blue lake of birth
You came a laughing child,
I stained and dulled with earth
Down from my mountains wild.

You leapt into my arms,
Clear as your infancy;
And all your heavenly charms
Felt my impurity.

Now we together go,
Merged and for ever one;
The waves that loved you so,
Have sullied all your own.

AT ENGELBERG.

Ill and alone on alien shores,
At noontide when the hot sun fires
With blinding light the silver spires
Of ice-tops, when the sick stream pours
His everlasting torrent down
The tumbled wreck of splintered stone,
And black impending pines alone
Assuage the mountain's horrid frown,
'Tis sad to sit and dream of thee,
Dear England, deep in greenery.

IN THE INN AT BERCHTESGADEN.

Child with the gentle tired eyes
And pallid cheek and faint wan smile,
I love your courteous shy replies
And soft persuasive ways, the while
On day-long tedious service bent
You bear our whims and discontent.

For hard it is to please alway
The hundred guests who come and go,
To see fresh faces every day,
And hear the same unchanging flow
Of hasty words that wants express
And idle wishes numberless.

I marvel not your lips are wan,
And soft and languid every limb,
And faint as dawn the blush upon
Those cheeks so delicate and dim;
For like a flower that pines away,
You fade for light and air and play.

I would that I could bear you hence
Afar to field, or hill, or wood,
To watch new life in every sense
Expand with free and pulsing blood,
To see your eyes with pleasure glow,
And hear your laughter fresh and low.

That cannot be: but day by day
Life brings you nothing new or bright:
The bloom of boyhood dies away;
And youth, unsunned by youth's delight,
Yields place to manhood tame and drear—
Blank year succeeding to blank year.

SEHNSUCHT.

Away? and whither would you fly
With those dove wings? Beyond the west,
Where sinks the weary sun to rest
In yon dim tracts of azure sky?

Or do you know some island deep
In far-off undiscovered seas,
Where summer breezes never cease,
And rivers murmuring lull to sleep?

None such I know: but I would flee
O'er fields of mellowing corn, which stand
Thick-set with oak on English land,
In twilight to the southern sea:

And I would cross that silver tide
Beneath the moonbeams pale and still;
Nor light upon the vine-clad hill,
Nor halt by rivers deep and wide:

But on through zones of glimmering light
And shadow, over tower and tree,
Across the land of France I'd flee;
Till far before me through the night

Rose cloud-like, serrated, secure,
The dim mysterious Alpine range,
Whose snows perpetual never change,
Whose breath is clear and cool and pure.

And there before day's herald star
Had touched the eastern horns with white,
I'd pass by Thun that hears all night
The swift out-goings of the Aar:

Over the lake and up the vale
Between the pines my way I'd wing,
And see the founts of morning spring
Upon the Jungfrau's forehead pale.

But I must wait: for those dove wings
Are wanting: now the upward lawn
Of Mürren soon will take the dawn
By me unheeded. Memory brings

Rocks, torrents, pine-woods, ferns and flowers
Before me: but I lay my head
In London on a weary bed,
And watch the slowly sliding hours.

MORGENLIED.

At Mürren let the morning lead thee out
  To walk upon the cold and cloven hills,
To hear the congregated mountains shout
  Their pæan of a thousand foaming rills.
Raimented with intolerable light,
  The snow-peaks stand above thee, row on row
Arising, each a seraph in his might;
  An organ each of varied stop doth blow.
Heaven's azure dome trembles through all her spheres,
  Feeling that music vibrate; and the sun
Raises his tenor as he upward steers;
  And all the glory-coated mists that run
Beneath him in the valley, hear his voice,
And cry unto the dewy fields: rejoice!

THE EIGER AND THE MÖNCH.

I will elect no other types but you,
Dread comrades, to denote the love of friends.—
Faithful, unfaltering, as yon arch of blue

That o'er your everlasting forehead bends,
You take with smile unstirred the kiss of morn
And the fierce tyranny of storm that rends

Gnarled pines upon your splintered base forlorn.—
How awful o'er grey cloud-wreaths big with lightning
Towers yon marmoreal splendour-cinctured horn,

Whereon the sun we see not here is brightening
A world of things not ours! How dread as death
The brother peak sundered by mists, but whitening

In the same radiance, and with equal breath
Breathing defiance to the transient storm!—
The life of many nations minisheth:

Arts, tongues, creeds, cities, like the fitful form
Of visionary fever, fall to nought:
But on your frozen summits vainly warm

Beat summer sunbeams, vainly fury-fraught
Howls the wild fiend of winter; for ye shine
More perdurable than a poet's thought,

Though carved of frailest snow-flakes crystalline.
Fit types are ye of Love whereby the spirit
Towers o'er the flux of change and chance divine,

Breathing the air that sons of God inherit,
And stationed on the wrecks of shifting time—
Majestic in the pure untarnished merit

Of wills resolved and fortitude sublime—
Ethereal, firm of form, so subtly spun
Of true soul-substance that the morning rime

Seems not more transitory; yet no sun
Of smiling fortune, nor of adverse fate
Shrewd-smiting petulance hath ever won

Vantage or victory from that calm state.—
Lovers and comrades! Sempiternal twain!
To you this hour of eve I consecrate.

Lo, golden shafts, cleaving the azure grain
Of cloudless ether! Lo, around you shivering
Pyre-flames of day dead in triumphant pain!

Westward ye gaze, where sharp mid saffron quivering,
Hesper, emergent, like a seraph's tear,
Shines; and the moon, as though from sleep delivering

On Latmos height Endymion, in the clear
Sapphire sails lucent. Ah! full well I ween
Wherefore those lustrous satellites appear!

What art thou, Hesper, but the joy serene
Of youth to youth responsive? And thou, Pearl,
Making thy progress through dim skies, a queen,

What art thou but the beauty of a girl?
Even her we choose and through long lapse of life
Cling to mid stars that storm and cloud enfurl.

I fail: too far my beating spirit's strife
Hath borne me: with strained parables I play:
Yet to the seeing eye the world is rife
With symbols; nor doth wayward fancy stray.

I TRE FELICI.

PRELUDE.

Ladies with lutes, and boys with viols, clad
In raiment green as are the meadow-grasses;
Young men love-laden, many a listening lad,

And many a youth whose high clear voice surpasses
Tenor of flute or spirit-thrilling strings:
A silent sleepy lake beside them glasses

Broad brows, and eyes dreaming of hidden things.
Far overhead wide whispering pine-trees roof
The glistening band, like outspread angels' wings:

Those sombre cedar-boughs are scarce sun-proof;
But here and there a shaft of light will stream
O'er glowing cheeks and lips, whereon the woof

Of shy love-thoughts are woven as though in dream:
Flowers at their feet, mingling with fruits, betoken
That summer yet can spare one golden beam,

Nor leave the world to winter's spells unspoken.—
Such was the scene my slumbering fancy painted,
And left me shorn of joy when sleep was broken.

Therefore, before its glimmering hues had fainted,
I sought old masters in the lore of love,
And found, amid the lives that song hath sainted,

Three fervent souls, that held my dream above
Oblivion's waters; three strong hearts, whom ye
Who list my tale, may learn to love like me.

I TRE FELICI.

Iroldo brave in Padua long ago
Loved the fair maid Miranda: he, I ween,
Was loved no less than Lancelot whom, ye know,
Fate in her blindness joined to Arthur's queen:
Yea, each on each these lovers doted so
That every day from dawn to eve serene,
And every night from eve to break of day
They thought of little else but love alway.

Now near unto Miranda's dwelling rose
A palace fair with gardens girdled round,
Wherein mid flowery copse and fragrant close
Birds of all plumage rich and rare were found:
There through the summer heat a fountain flows
Cooling the grasses of the pleasant ground,
And from the trees the house with porches wide
Of polished marble springs in stately pride.

Here dwelt Prasildo, noblest knight of all
Who through the ringing lists of Padua ran,
Stalwart of limb, and frank and liberal,
Stout in his love, a lion-hearted man;
Great was his wealth, but he, nor prodigal,
Nor niggard, dealt his gold as monarchs can,
Sowing therewith of courtesy the field,
And reaping for himself bright honour's yield.

Unto this garden when the year was now
Mellowing toward autumn, and gay jewels hung
Of crimson and of gold on every bough,
And all the songs of summer were unsung,
A festal band to crown the wine-god's brow
With ripening grapes was bidden: bright and young
Were all the faces at that festival,
But brightest shone Miranda's eyes of all:

For here Love lit a heaven of stars, and here
Were hopes aflame of happy days to be,
When in a few short weeks the dying year
Should join her life with music and with glee
Unto the life of him she held so dear;
Yea, scarce three months of cold virginity
Remained between her bliss and his who stood
Beside her now in that fair multitude.

Songs in the air from lute and viol flew,
And smiles along the stream like sunlight glinted;
And tales were told, and flowers of many a hue
Were woven into crowns, and kisses printed

For forfeits on rose-blooming cheeks that grew
Rosier beneath red lips; the grass was dinted
With dainty limbs of idlers, stretched at ease
Throughout the pleasance 'neath the windless trees.

Then cried Miranda, 'Who will play with me
The game we loved as children,—Touch and Guess?
Here will I sit: each knight on bended knee
In turn shall hide his head within my dress,
Holding his hands behind his back; while ye
Who list, shall one by one approach and press
His lifted palms: his task it is to tell
Which hand hath touched him:—have I spoken well?'

No sooner said than straight the game began:
Prasildo first before the maiden bent;
He knelt heart-whole, a love-untroubled man,
Who knew but as a tale what sorrow meant;
A thrall he rose of Love who maketh wan
The face of lovers with pale discontent;
Yea, in a moment he had learned the lore
Of grief and ecstasy unknown before.

For leaning in her lap his fervent face,
Such fire he felt within his bosom leap
As never yet in May the flower-like grace
Of maidens lighted: and his heart did keep
Close parley how to linger in that place,
Drinking of love's intoxication deep;
Till by sad misadventure from his tongue
The name of one who touched his hand was wrung.

And then he raised his head and saw the skies
And waving trees and merry crowd once more,
And gazed upon her face with altered eyes,
And felt like one who on an alien shore
Laid in his sleep, awakes with dim surprise,
Knowing that nought will be as heretofore;
Even so Prasildo started from his dream
To pace a new man by his native stream.

Nor when the guests were gone, and now again
In silence fell the dead leaves one by one
Upon the swirling brook like golden rain,
Could he shake off his memories or shun
The joy that thrilled him with unwonted pain.
Night came; yet birds their matins to the sun
Had chanted, ere at last the sleep he sought,
For one brief moment freed his soul from thought.

And when he woke, his arms were opened wide
To clasp a flying shadow; swiftly flew
His dream on wings of sleep, and hungry-eyed
Forth from the couch his weary limbs he drew;
Yet felt such pleasure and so strange a pride,
That could he have forsworn this passion new,
Methinks he would have scorned so weak a will:—
Let those who love, judge if I reckon ill.

Horses and hounds, wherein he erst delighted,
Now please him not: all noisy pleasure banned,
He seeks the company of passion-sprighted
Pale men, within whose eyes his soul hath scanned

The fire of fervid yearning; songs indited
By living love are on his lips; his hand
Clasps the frail lutè, and oftentimes he flies
From haunts of men to commune with the skies.

Or if he seek the crowd, it is to shine
'Neath ladies' smiles in ball-rooms, or to spur
His thundering steed along the glittering line
Of tournament or joust: upon the fur
That clasps his helm, flutter with silver twine
Enmeshed the colours that belong to her—
To her,—to bright Miranda:—bitter fate
That binds this champion to another's mate!

And he who was so courteous, now hath grown
The very soul of courtesy; for still
The seed of good a thousand fold is sown
In men that love: yea, Love doth root all ill
From hearts where he hath harboured; round his throne
Spring only flowers divine, adorable,
That with their perfume and their splendour make
Gods of poor mortals for their master's sake.

But ah, the sorry suit that he must plead!
'Tis all in vain that morn and noon and night
He tells Miranda of his spirit's need,
Pouring his heart forth in her love's despite:
His presents and his prayers she will not heed;
For she hath sworn her troth, and this poor wight,
By passion fooled, must fare as best he can,
Without his star a melancholy man.

Meanwhile Prasildo, dwindling hour by hour
In vain love-longings, grew more weak and wan
Than are the petals of some April flower
Untimely born ere winter winds are gone:
The snow that melts beneath a southern shower
On Alpine slopes, when once the sun hath shone,
Flows not more suddenly to waste than he,
Blasted by burning love's inclemency.

From banquet and from tourney, sick at ease,
Self-scorning and self-loathing, forth he flies
To hide himself beneath the leafless trees,
Wherethrough the waning moon with pallid eyes
Peers, and the wind, wailing like weary seas,
Tunes a sad symphony to lovers' sighs;
Thin, pale, and gaunt, and haggard, like a shade
Of his old self, he haunts the lonely glade.

Here once it happened on a silvery morn
Of late November rode the lovers blest,
Iroldo and Miranda, with the horn
Waking the red deer from their winter rest:
But as they rode, a voice of grief was borne
To their glad ears; and on their happy breast
The woe they knew not, like a jarring note
Heard mid the harmony of viols, smote.

'O leafless trees and flying clouds,' it cried,
'Hear me! since she, too cruel, will not hear;
And thou, pale shade of death, that by my side
Walkest, my only friend and comrade dear! —

Lo, I will make the barren grave my bride,
And kiss the bitter worm, since all my cheer,
Hope, courage, health, and youth and fond delight,
Have lured me to interminable night.

'Fool that I am to dote upon a face,
To lay me down like a slain deer and die,
When all the shining world is full of grace,
And love from many a tender melting eye
Were mine, would I but seek it! Oh disgrace
And shame of manhood! Shall the stream run dry
Because, forsooth, it falls into the sea,
When toward yon silver lake it fain would flee?

'Nay, but Love knows not reason. Laughing lord
Of whom he favours, he doth keep a bowl
With madness and intoxication stored
For those he hateth; and my hunted soul
Hath drunk thereof down to the dregs.—This sword
Is all that's left to cure me: cast control
This moment to the winds: come gentle Death,
Sole friend and nurse of him who sorroweth!'

So wailed Prasildo, while his trembling hand
The belt unbuckled and the blade unbound:
Pale were his cheeks, and scarcely could he stand
To plant the sword's hilt on the leafy ground:
But from his lips the keen north wind that fanned
His feverish forehead, bore a piteous sound;
For still he cried 'Miranda!' with wild sighs
Hoping to waft his soul to Paradise.

Meanwhile Miranda and her lover brave
Heard the sad words; and in that loyal pair
Desire was kindled like a fire to save
So sweet a soul, distraught with such despair,
From folly and the darkness of the grave.
Leaving Iroldo 'neath the branches bare,
Forth sprang the maiden like a flash of light
Along the stream before Prasildo's sight.

'Stay your rash hand, Prasildo! Were it mine
To give, this love which I have pledged another,
Think you for us a second day should shine
Before I soothed your sorrow? Be my brother:—
Although we never lisped our infantine
Prayers at the dear knees of one loving mother,
Yet may the name of brethren bind us both
By ties as sacred as the marriage oath.

'How can I seek to pleasure you? how wrest
A life so stainless from so foul a fate?
Ask aught that I may give with open breast;
For mid my joy I shall be desolate,
If in my soul the thought of you unblest,
A wandering ghost, self-slain, disconsolate,
Haunting the limbo of dead lovers, lies
Like the cold magic of a serpent's eyes.'

Back from the bourne of Death his spirit flew,
Hearing her plead, and fire within his brain
Kindled, while sudden rapture strange and new
Flashed through him with a momentary pain.

He could not speak nor sigh. Gasping he drew
Quick breath. E'en thus the drowned man breathes again;
And thus, methinks, upon death's brink the life
That will not die, is wrung from mortal strife.

But as the whirring pulses grew more still,
A light he scarce discerned began to break
His spirit's gloom, and o'er the deadly chill
Of blank despair spread with a living ache
The warmth of hope; then while his perfect will
Yet slumbered, like a man but half awake
He cried:—'Amid these waves stretch forth your hand;
Flinch not, Miranda, bring me safe to land!

'Give me but hope: say that you will be mine,
If some unthought, unheard of deed I do
To win you!' She moved only by divine
Mercy, forgetful of herself, and true
In heart to her own love, o'erleapt the line
Of prudence; for she cried:—'I challenge you
To make you garden in mid-winter gay
With blossoms brighter than the bloom of May.

'If this you can do, ere my marriage morn,
I will be yours to save you. But beware:
Live not to be the fool of blank self-scorn.
The cure you seek is desperate: light as air
Are all the hopes of such vain fancy born.
Yet, as I fain would see you shun the snare
Madness hath spread to take you, what you ask
I answer thus, and set your soul to task.'

She ceased, and he, such force hath love to win
Assurance for faith wild beyond belief,
Felt the calm strength of manhood throb within
His heart that fluttered like an aspen leaf:
Nor did dumb conscience whisper it were sin
For his own selfish sake to drown in grief
The pure sweet soul, who of her pity gave
This wanton pledge to wrest him from the grave.

Reckless he shouted: 'Oh my love! 'tis done.
In mid December doubt not I will make
My garden bloom beneath a summer sun.
Soft airs shall blow, and nightingales shall wake
Their bridal songs to greet you. Lo, I run
Provision for this festival to take.
Thanks, thanks, Miranda! You to-day have given
Hopes that exalt my soul from hell to heaven.'

She pensive to Iroldo backward wending,
Thought only of Love's lightness, how he clings
To frailest hope beneath the breezes bending
Of fickle chance, nor doubts impossible things;
Her own true love she met the glade descending,
And told him all: he smiled as one who flings
Pity at triflers, 'Ah poor man! forlorn
Must be his garden on our marriage morn.'

Yet neither he nor she, though lovers leal,
Reckoned the miracles that Love hath wrought
In souls on whom he sets his sternest seal:
For stronger than the grave, more swift than thought,

Calmer than frost, more cold and keen than steel,
Is Love by Death sublimed and frenzy-fraught
To rapture: in such moods a man will sell
For one brief hour of joy his soul to hell.

A serf so tempered by the fiery god
Was wild Prasildo: who until this hour
But in a dream the paths of youth had trod,
Plucking from day to day the scentless flower
Of innocence, that starred the turfy sod:
Now rudely roused from slumber by the power
Of tyrannous passion, all the world was red
With flame and blood around his restless head:

And first he prayed to saints, pouring strange vows
With fast and penance at their altar-bars;
As though some human pity he might rouse
In passionless pure hearts above the stars:
But in the earnest eyes and tranquil brows
Of angels far withdrawn from mortal jars,
He only read cold anger and disdain
Of turbulent, unconsecrated pain.

'Then since the saints reject me,' in his rage,
'I will move hell,' he thundered: 'not for nought
Hath blear-eyed Folco turned the magic page
With rune and mystical red image wrought
Of planets that control the rolling age.
A score of fiends attend him, and his thought
Weaves, as he listeth, into solid things
The woof and warp of wild imaginings.'

Swift weeks had sped; and now the longest night
Of drear December brooded on the plain.
The legioned stars in broad battalions bright
From East to West, a slow continuous train,
Glided, while Folco from his turret's height
Followed one star across the silent main,
Pointing at times upon his astrolabe
The mummied finger of a murdered babe.

'Twas thus Prasildo found him; and the seer
Seemed of his purpose well aware, for he
Cried through the twilight: 'Be of better cheer,
Prasildo! None hath ever sued to me
Sore-hearted, but he found a saviour near.
Nathless remember from fate's tyranny
I cannot win thee for a little price:
Art thou prepared to barter Paradise?'

'Nay, take my soul: for what is heaven or hell?
Heaven's the fruition of a dear desire;
And hell itself, whatever priests may tell,
Is but the torment of a heart on fire:
Myself am hell and heaven; I cannot sell
More than this self; to take the damning hire
Of thrice ten thousand fiends could bring no worse
Than unassuagèd love's unending curse.'

The old man pondered: 'Be it so. The truth
Lies thus: ourselves unto ourselves are heaven:
And he who hath no reverence and no ruth
For his own soul, alive to hell is given.

Thou fain would'st die: the blossom of thy youth
Could move thee not to mercy; passion-riven
Against thy throat I saw thee set thy knife:
Therefore I grant thy boon and save thy life.

'I save thy life and give thee what thou cravest:
But thou for this art damned; and I am lost
By helping thee; unless at last thou savest,
As God I know will aid thee, at what cost
I know not, that poor soul whereof thou ravest.
E'en as we speak, thy spirit's star hath crossed
By fore-appointed paths yon wilderness,
Whose ways and where they tend I do but guess.'

Up to the skies he pointed, and a shaft
Flew from the zenith downward:—'twas a sphere
That fell or seemed to fall: Prasildo laughed,
Though in his heart he felt a sudden fear;
Then cried, 'When once my eager soul hath quaffed
Her cup of pleasure, let the end be near!—
The boon I ask, is: make my garden gay
To-morrow with the leaves and flowers of May!'

'Ay,' quoth the Wizard, 'while we speak, 'tis done!
Already buds are bursting on the bough;
Green leaves will wave against the rising sun;
And the keen icicles on winter's brow
Melting shall make the pleasant fountain run.
Go home in peace and sleep a little now:
The bride and bridegroom passing by thy door,
Will see flowers dance along the grassy floor.'

Oh keen and cruel blew the northern blast,
And from the Alpine barriers sleet was borne;
Chains on the running water-brooks were cast,
And birds in air fell numb, that chilly morn
Which to Iroldo gave his bride at last:
Nathless through Padua rang the merry horn;
And marriage guests came trooping, and the glee
Afar was heard of piping minstrelsy.

Then forth they fared, the bridegroom with his squires
Arrayed in crimson fine and costly fur,
The bride among her maids in brave attires
Of lace and velvet and rich minever.
Before them, pacing in gay pageant, choirs
Of boys with ringing song glad echoes stir;
And white-robed maidens down the crowded street,
Shower laurel-leaves before the lovers' feet.

They, hand in hand, dreamed softly as they went,
Of all the joy that after-years should bear;
And in their hearts the soul of deep content
Spread like the soft breath of the southern air,
Waking shy violets with summer scent
Amid the bleak March meadows unaware.
Dear love so lapped them that the winter wild
Fell on their glowing cheeks with kisses mild.

Until at last Miranda whispered: 'Soon
We reach Prasildo's palace. Ah poor man!
I granted him in scorn a sorry boon
To save his spirit from the bitter ban.

How cold and comfortless beneath the moon
His garden grove will spread bare branches wan
To-night, while we with music and with song
Like living flowers glide through the gleeful throng.'

'Yea,' cried Iroldo, 'safe enough I trow
Was that fair promise made by thee to pay
The forfeit of thy love for summer glow
On leafless boughs and winter changed to May!
Yet he was noble, and his overthrow
Hath cast some sadness on our bridal day.
Before yon frosty house we cannot go
Without a sign of pity for his woe.'

So whispering, on they passed: when suddenly
A shout arose, and all the surging crowd
This way and that dividing, let them see
Prasildo's gilded gateway, overbrowed
With roses rioting luxuriantly,
And jasmines in a silvery scented cloud;
The while through open doors a summer breeze
Blew from faint flowers and heavy-blossomed trees.

The lawns within were green with grass, and pied
With tulips and with hyacinths; and the fires
Of wild anemone and pheasant-eyed
Adonis burned beneath tall lily spires.
On cedar bough and cypress far and wide
Clematis flung wild clusters, and the choirs
Of nightingales and thrushes deep embayed
In heavy foliage thrilled the listening glade.

There stood Prasildo waiting, passion-pale.
Fierce were his eyes; the furrows on his brow
Told of long misery their ghastly tale.
His cheeks were lean with hunger; but the bough
He waved of pink May-blossom faint and frail,
Like the drear symbol of a dreadful vow,
Chilled poor Miranda with the frost of death,
Mocking her anguish with its charméd breath.

O irony of fate! fantastic doom
That stars with sweet spring flowers yon withered lawn!
One touch hath made Despair's bleak garden bloom,
And in a moment turned the April dawn
Of those two wedded lives to winter's gloom.
Prasildo hath Miranda's soul in pawn,
And will not loose it. For her promise made
So lightly, now the forfeit must be paid.

Back to her home speechless the maiden flies,
Nor heeds the murmur of the amazéd throng:
Face downward on her narrow bed she lies,
Wrestling with blank dismay and anguish strong:
Fire in her heart and fever in her eyes
Have wrought her girlish beauty cruel wrong:
And all about the room in fury strewn
Lie the torn fragments of her bridal zone.

In frantic words at length and stormy tears
The torrent of her misery finds a vent:
'Ah, wherefore was I born to blight the years
Of budding youth with wintry discontent?

E'en death, whose touch the loveless spirit cheers,
Can help me not; my folly's punishment
Obligeth me to live and keep my troth—
I cannot now draw backward from my oath.

'Who would have thought that such a thing could be?
Fool! fool! I loved, yet dared of Love to try
The dreadful strength and deadly subtlety!
Faith can move mountains, and fierce Love can fly
Swifter than thought o'er the unfooted sea:
Before his breath the earth and steadfast sky
Shift as he listeth: courage, cunning, might,
Spring from his smile in measure infinite.

'Alas, Iroldo! not for me alone
I grieve:—this blow will slay thee.' Here the storm
Of woe submerged her utterance, and a moan
Shook like wind-driven froth her shuddering form.
Iroldo who had crept unseen, unknown,
Close to her side, now touched the tresses warm
With tears, that mistlike lay along the bed,
And strove with tender words to raise her head.

Up from the couch she started; and her face
Glowed crimson, as at eventide a star
Blushes through forest boughs that interlace
Their shadowy leaves athwart the luminous bar
Of sunset. In a long and close embrace
Her lover locked her. Thick, irregular,
Their breathing came and went; and in that strain
Each prayed that death might set them free from pain.

At length, tear-tired, and all with sighs outworn,
Iroldo sobbed: 'Dear heart of mine, 'twas I
Who wrought this folly on that fatal morn.
I nursed the serpent mercy, when the cry
Of that mad lover should have wakened scorn.
The fault was mine alone: therefore to die
Is all that's left me: dearest, grieve not thou,
But rise and dry thy tears and smooth thy brow:

'When I am dead, and he who loved thee so
That for thy sake he dared impossible things,
Hath with his tender service soothed thy woe,
Forget me in thy mirth, as April flings
All thoughts behind her of the melted snow.
If in the grave meanwhile some memory clings,
'Twill comfort me to feel that thou above
Art living in the light of happier love.'—

'Ah, thankless and unkind, false to thy vow!
To think that I without thee could live on!
Where is thy love? Thy protestations now
Are proved as worthless as a dream that's gone.
Once thou didst say and swear—"my bliss art thou,
Without thy face the light of heaven were wan:"
And now, forsooth, contentedly to Hell
Alone thou farest, with thyself to dwell.

'Take me too with thee! let me be thy bride
By blank oblivion's waters! Ringed around
With torment and with flame on every side,
'Twill be some sweetness that our love is crowned.

I for our last long slumber will provide.
I know where subtle poison can be found.
Five hours within our veins the juice shall brew
Unfelt. Then life and loathéd love adieu!

'Five hours shall be Prasildo's: I will pay
My folly's forfeit, and his forceful lust
Shall riot in our anguish half a day.
Yea, he shall see life's blossom turn to dust:
His spells that wrought midwinter into May,
Matched with the powerful draught wherein I trust,
Shall nought avail. Our souls at least are free
To choose red Hell instead of slavery.'

Fire in her eyes and frenzy in her soul
Have dried the fountain of weak tears; while he,
Self-doomed to death, beneath the mad control
Of her strong will bends like a broken tree.
Already she hath clasped the deadly bowl:
Already, weighted well with golden fee,
Her trusty page hath flown to buy the bane,
Which whoso tastes shall never smile again.

And now the herbs are in her hand; and now
She mixes them with many a muttered word.
Hard were the wrinkles on Iroldo's brow,
When from her hand he took the potion stirred.
One half he drained; and less than half I trow
Will change the milk of life to lethal curd.
She to the cup setting in turn her lips,
Sends cold death tingling to her finger tips.

Meanwhile her lover on the couch was laid
Speechless, with eyes and forehead closely shrouded
From gazing at the courage of the maid:
Doffing her marriage robes with gems o'erclouded,
In mourning garment of grey serge arrayed,
Forth from the house she passed, and through the crowded
City, unwatched, unseen, sped on like one
Who fain would hide her misery from the sun.

Cold blew the blast about her till she came
With keen set eyes of sorrow gazing through
Her heavy-hooded cloak of fear and shame,
Unto Prasildo's palace: there the dew
Of sweet May morning glistened, and the flame
Of new-born blossoms blazed beneath heaven's blue:
They, as she brushed them, burned her, and the choir
Of song-birds in her ears poured liquid fire.

But, for she knew swift death was in her blood,
Great calm possessed her when ere noon of day
Before Prasildo's very face she stood:
He lifting from her brows the wimple grey,
Saw the sweet eyes that in the leafless wood
Had wept to succour him: and 'Well away!'
Kneeling he cried, 'How sorrowful and wan,
Dear lady, are thine eyes to gaze upon!'

She standing like a saint with golden hair
Tear-tangled and unbound for aureole,
Looked down upon him speechless, statue-fair
And very patient: then at length his soul

Unto the depth was troubled with strange care,
That like a visionary vapour stole
Between the bliss he dreamed of and the truth
Of her unspoken unrepining ruth.

Rising he led her to the crimson dais,
Broidered with sunflowers in golden thread,
And over-canopied with cloudy lace:
There as she took her state, around her head
Rained sunlight in the solitary place:
White were her lips and not a word she said,
Gazing with earnest eyes as sad to see
As were our Lady's eyes on Calvary:

So that at last he moaned: 'Oh cruel fate,
That gives me what I yearned for and therewith
Hath made my only love disconsolate!
I pray thee speak; for at this moment death
Than thy cold silence were less desolate.'
She from her bosom heaved a heavy breath,
And smiled a little smile, and said: 'The bliss
For which you sold your soul and mine is this:

'Take it: the pleasure of my love is yours,
And shall be yours for four long lingering hours;
I keep my vow; but frosty grief endures
E'en mid this paradise of magic flowers:
My honour I have murdered; death secures,
Amid the cold unconsecrated bowers
Of hapless love in hell, a home for me
And him to whom I cling eternally.

'Were I my own to give, most gentle knight,
Full well you know that you had won my heart;
But how can love be love in love's despite?
I never loved, but pitied you. The smart
Of your sharp sorrow with a sudden blight
Fell on my soul; and in your fate a part
Have we:—Iroldo and myself must die.—
We have drunk poison.—Lo! the minutes fly!'

Her words like frozen snow-flakes through the still
Rich scented amber sunlight fell, and he,
Though wreathed with summer blossoms, felt the chill
Invade his heart of bleak fatality.
On the rose-boughs outside the window-sill
The nightingales and thrushes sang in glee;
While from his soul the shriek of sharp despair
Rang like a discord on the troubled air.

'Fool, fool! thrice blinded in my selfish pride!
To think that I could win by gifts like these
So leal a lady and so pure a bride!—
But thou, dear love, hadst thou no spell to freeze
The fevered current of my blood,—to guide
My maddened will; no faith in courtesies?
The sight of thee so sorrowful had turned
To cooling dew the fire that in me burned.'

One kiss he laid upon her lips, then rose
And wrapt the coarse grey serge her eyes around,
Leading her silent through the scented close.
There all the beauty of the garden ground

Flamed like a prophecy of coming woes.
But ere they reached the outer gate, he bound
A branch of myrtle bloom about her head,
And bade her bear it to death's bridal bed.

So she once more went forth into the sleet,
And found her love and told him all her tale;
Then laid her down locked in his arms to meet
Sure death descending like a misty veil.
Meanwhile with aching heart and heavy feet
Prasildo wandered through the grassy dale
That stretched beneath his palace, and the strength
Of vain remorse shattered his dream at length;

So that he stood a disenchanted man
Before the wreck his selfish sin had wrought.
'Too late, too late!' he cried, 'now falls the ban
Foretold by Folco, with damnation fraught.'
Nor dares he lengthen out the sorry span
Of that loathed life which yet remains; for nought
Can bring the stainless souls whom he hath lost
Back from the shores of everlasting frost.

Crushing the flowers, prone 'neath the murmurous trees
That from their heaven of foliage scattered song,
He lay with heart like lead, waiting to seize
The cold steel at his side; when, soft and strong,
The sound of footsteps, o'er the chalices
Of lily flowers and hyacinths borne along,
Startled his ears and by the stream he heard
One stay who broke the silence with a word:

'Prasildo!' The voice carried calm; but well
He knew that Folco waited there to claim
The dreadful guerdon of his muttered spell:
'Prasildo, dost thou hear me? Hath the shame
Which damns thy spirit to the depth of Hell,
Already wrought oblivion of thy name?
Prasildo, listen! I am here to give
A way whereby thy spirit yet may live.'

'Talk not to me of living: I am dead—
Thrice dead in selfish folly, senseless crime!
If thou hast any comfort, on my head
Scatter the coals of curses—there is time
Perchance to save those lovers I have sped
To death and darkness in their beauty's prime!
Leave me to die, but help them. All I have
Is thine, if thou but save them from the grave.'

'To God be glory and great praise for this!'
Deep-chested spake the grey-beard, 'I have won
To-day three souls from folly to Thy bliss.
There is no living man beneath the sun
Who, hemmed all round with sin and wretchedness,
Hath any right before his race be run,
To faint or yield his spirit to the foe!
Live therefore: rise and live, despite thy woe.'

Why lengthen out the tale? Prasildo lifted
Wide haggard eyes, and heard as one who dreams,
That the black bark wherein Miranda drifted,
Led by despair adown death's silent streams,

Was but a sleep-ensuring shallop, gifted
With rarest virtue to obscure the beams
Of sunlight for a season, by his skill
Who watched her lulled upon the slumberous rill.

For Folco reading clearly what should be,
Had in his wisdom spun the perilous thread
Whereon those three souls trembled :—it was he
To whom Miranda's messenger had sped :—
Therefore he bade Prasildo rise and see
The lovers laid upon their bridal bed :—
Locked in each other's arms, and pale as death,
They drank deep draughts of rest with even breath.

Then were the fountains of delicious tears
Loosed in Prasildo's heart, and humbly kneeling
He vows to God the remnant of his years;
Over that wounded heart the wings of healing
Are lightly waved, and on his spirit's ears
The musical still voice of hope is stealing,
While through the long night-watches calm and deep
He holds his vigil o'er the lovers' sleep.

A little hour ere dawn, what time the sky
Paled with the first grey twilight, from the bed
He raised them slumbering still, and silently
Bore them beneath dim stars, and lightly laid
Each in the other's arms upon the dry
Couch of crisp myrtle-boughs, which he had spread
Beside his fountain, where the sward was still
Abloom with crocus and with daffodil.

The orient reddened into rose, and shone
With liquid gold, while yet their trance profound
Lapped them together lying: then the sun
Shot upward from the nether world, and crowned
The brows of heaven with radiance: night was gone,
Nor were the chains of dreamless sleep unbound,
Till Folco touched their drowsy foreheads pale,
And they awaking heard the nightingale.

They dreamed they were in Eden, till their eyes
Fell on the mute petition of the man
By whose wild will this earthly Paradise
Had bloomed in mid December. Sorrow-wan,
Not now with selfish tears, he bids them rise,
And through the happy years of love live on
Forgiving and forgetful—so he prays—
Of all the misery of these winter days.

They, not unlessoned by the dreadful doom
Of yesterday, pace the enamelled grass:
Then as the pictures in a curtained room
Painted on darkness by a magic glass
Fade suddenly, so all the garden's bloom
Before their wondering eyes did change and pass,
And once again king frost o'er lawn and lea
Resumed his spell-suspended empery.

Yet not within their souls was frost: for bliss
And peace in equal measure crowned the three:
True friends and tried they grew; their happiness
Each in the other's service, came to be

A test whereby men gauged the courtesies
Of comradeship and love and loyalty:
I tre felici was the name they won,
Nor were there lives more leal beneath the sun.

SPRING SONGS.

IN MARCH.

Spring, pass into the air!
  Let the months of misery wane.
Shall I meet with my friend anywhere?
  Will he turn my sorrow to gain?
Shall I find him in croft or garden,
Where the buds 'neath the north winds harden?
  Will he bid me be merry again?

Love, pass into my soul!
  Let the frost of grief be as rain;
Make the sore stricken places whole;
  And lay cool hands on my pain.
In the wood, on the hill, by the river,
I then may laugh and deliver
  The mirth that is mine again.

II.

AT CLIFTON

The voice of the spring
  Is heard in the land:
The feathery wing
  Of April hath fanned
Those tree-tops that soar
From the deep river-shore
  To the cliff where I stand.

The soft-cushioned feet
  Of the spring-god are set
Where yew-branches meet;
  And the mosses are wet,
Under chestnut and thorn,
With blossoms new born
  Of dim violet.

Like stars in the grass
  The wind-flowers lie,
And little clouds pass
  Far above in the sky:
Lent lilies beneath
Have broken their sheath,
  To laugh and to die.

O love, unto whom
  Should I turn but to thee,
Mid the music and bloom
  Of the spring symphony?
Let us laugh, let us sing:
Love, laughter, and spring
  Are deathless as we!

III.

AN APRIL DAY.

There is a breath of Venice in the breeze,
A scent of distant seas.
Walking the city street and square,
I feel as though toward nightfall, in the fair
Transparent air,
The awning of our gondola would take
The winds that shake
Their fluttering pinions over Lido's sand,
And we should land,
Pacing between the sphered skies hyaline
And glistening brine.—
Yes, there are breaths of Venice in the breeze:
A scent of distant seas,
This languid lazy April day,
Surpriseth me alway.

Here in the town the chestnut buds
Are bursting; and the woods
With gummy growing odours sweet
Our faint sense greet.
I know not whether upon field or square
The April air
Is gentler, softer, more imbued
With music that gives grace to solitude.

Better than solitude, with thee,
Thou melody
Of living movement, thus
To saunter, thus,
Through green paths odorous,
To let the silvery-vowelled fountain flow,—
To laugh and blow
Frail bubbles of thick-crowding fancies free,
O love, with thee!

O blooming white narcissus-bud that lendest
New beauty to the meadow where thou bendest!
The spring without thy scent were nought,
Scarce worth one thought,
Mid all its paradise of buds,
And floods
Of liquid air, and cloudy currents bright
With infinite
Pure rills of pulsing petulant sunlight!

'Tis from thy brows and eyes
The April skies
Take all their languid lustre, and from thee
The scent of distant sea
And thought of dreamy Venice float to me!

Ere night the rose that o'er yon Western bar
Enfolds love's star,
Doth seem to linger as if loth to leave;
And bright beams cleave,
Far past the hour of sunset, high
In the translucent sky:
Where all the blue and airy spaces shine
With eyes divine
Of tremulous lamps, that through
Laced bud and trellised bough
Of way-side trees, with spring-tide perfume sweet,
Smile down to greet
The upturned eyes of lovers bent
In ravishment
On heavens that are so mild, so near,
In this blest boyhood of the opening year.

O love, that by my side
Walkest the silent ways this scented eventide,
I swear it is thy bloom,
Thy delicate perfume,
That makes the soul of nature glad:
And I am mad

With no new April in my bounding vein;
But heart and brain
Are drowsèd with thy sweetness; and the heaven
Of thy mild brows hath given
Grace to all things I see;
And in thy life I live, and lose myself in thee!

IV.

ON THE THAMES.

O shout, for the morning
Hath heard April's warning,
And earth is adorning
  The bride-bed of May!
O shout, for the lover
Of flowers shall discover
Mid the haunts of the plover
  New snow-flakes to-day!

Low down on the river
Rathe aspen leaves shiver,
And soaring larks quiver,
  Aloft in the sun:
The whole world is ringing
With laughter and singing;
Why need we be clinging
  To grief that is gone?

v.

AT LYNTON.

O sing, sweet bird, and unbosom
  Thy joy on the bare ash-bough;
For the day is asleep, and her blossom
  Is deepening to violet now;
And the stars are beginning to tremble above,
Like flowers half seen in the forest of Love.

O sing, wild bird, in the gloaming:
  Sing not of the winter drear;
But sing of the summer that's coming,
  And sing of the spring that is here,
To thy mate who sits on her nest beneath,
While we, as we hear thee, hush our breath.

O sing to the sea-waves dreaming
  Far down on their rocks below,
And sing to the rills that are streaming
  From moors where the winter's snow
Hath melted to nourish the delicate shell
Of the frail wood-sorrel and bilberry bell.

The perfume of gorse hath arisen,
  The breeze is heavy with scent:
Let thy voice like a soul from prison
  Be borne on the darkness, and blent

With the beauty that breathes in the earth and the air,
And is felt through the twilight everywhere.

And now, for the moon is sphering
  Her splendour o'er mountain and sea,
Sit silent, sweet wild bird, hearing
  Through dreams the deep melody
That the sun and the earth and the stars all night
Prolong as they roll through the oceans of light.

VI.

ON THE DOWNS.

Up, up! for the earth is a-Maying,
And heaven herself is arraying
  With woven rose
Of cloudlets that float and shimmer,
Pink mists where the sunbeams glimmer
  In warm repose.

The boughs new-fledged are flinging
Green silver and gold with singing
  Aloft to the blue.
O heart of mine, be merry!
With the flower of the thorn and the cherry,
  Sing thy songs too!

VII.

A NOCTURNE.

The night is ours, the night is ours,
With all its breathing fiery flowers,
Star-blooms that in the garden shine
Of the translucent heaven divine.

The night is ours, the night is ours,
With all its interwoven bowers,
Dim blossom-burdened trees that shed
Their sleepy perfume overhead.

O scent of clematis and pine!
O wayward tendrils of the vine!
Wild honeysuckle and woodbine!
O rose-wreaths that forsaken fling
From cedar-branch and cypress-spire,
Black pyramids enlaced with fire,
Into the bosom of the spring
Multitudinous blossoming!
O snowy flakes of starred jasmine,
Pale streams of pearl-white eglantine,
That through the bosky thicket twine
In milky-wayed meandering!

The moon is rising: lo, she rounds
Her radiance over lawn and grove,
And from the ferny thicket sounds
A nightingale to greet her love!

Sing out, wild bird, and thrilling make
The night air mad: sing louder, shake
The petals of your song, and break
In spray its blossom for love's sake!

Ah me! in vain I bid you sing:
For who, oh who is there will bring
Heart-solace to my sorrowing?

Frail youth is fading: lo, she dies,
Like hyacinths who hang their head
Beneath the tempest-stricken skies;
And all the rosy hours are fled.

I wait, I wait: O lover! come,
Before the rathe ethereal bloom
Fade from the dawn of beauty, come!
O love, unknown, unseen, for whom
I weave the delicate perfume
Of roses white and ruddy, come!

Wild bird! Wild echo! voice of mine,
That wilder than the song divine
Of nightingales, upon the air
Trembles in passionate despair!

O heart within! O sore unrest!
Vain are the echo and the bird,
The long melodious cry that stirred
The sweet sad throbbings of my breast!
Since none there is whose whispered word
May sweeter, sweeter, sweeter be
Than echo, voice, or bird to me!

VIII.

AT CASTELLAMARE.

Awake, my Myrto, with the birth of day,
Forth to the meadow fare this first of May.

Not yet the sun with his o'ermastering might
Hath dried the pearlets upon bud and bloom;
Still in pale skies trembles the star of night,
Morn's herald star, and all the glorious gloom
Is waiting for the dawn to re-illume
Her eyes of fire above the burning bay.

Awake, my Myrto, with the birth of day,
Forth to the meadow fare this first of May.

See in thick pleachèd garden-alleys green
  How rose by rose deep-sunken drinks the dew:
Sheathed in soft sleep they hide their silken sheen,
  Nor know the passion of fierce light that through
  Their crimson spheres will shoot when morn is new:
So sleep not we when love invites to play.

Awake, my Myrto, with the birth of day,
Forth to the meadow fare this first of May.

Ah foolish rose! She hath one little hour
  To cast her sweetness on the amorous prime;
The kiss of noon her girlhood will deflower,
  The wanton bee about her lap will climb,
  And birds will sing their clear love-laden rhyme,
Till night descends that taketh all away.

Awake, my Myrto, with the birth of day,
Forth to the meadow fare this first of May.

CALLICRATES.

ARGUMENT.

ARISTODEMUS *the elder loves* CALLICRATES *the younger. Both are Spartan citizens.* ARISTODEMUS *goes with the army of* LEONIDAS *to Thermopylæ.* CALLICRATES *stays at home among the youths, called Irenes.* ARISTODEMUS *survives the battle of Thermopylæ, having slept, through mischance or malice of the gods, upon a certain journey undertaken by him at the command of* LEONIDAS. *Returning to Sparta alone, he suffers the disgrace of cowardice, and* CALLICRATES, *bound by the common feeling of the Spartans, refuses him kindness. Both march under* PAUSANIAS *to Platæa. There* CALLICRATES *is slain in the ranks before the battle, while* ARISTODEMUS *falls afterwards in the heat of combat. The two ghosts reach Hades,* CALLICRATES *first,* ARISTODEMUS *after a brief interval.*

TIME : *The evening after the Battle of Platæa.*

CALLICRATES.

SCENE: *The gates of Hades. Troops of Spirits, some in Persian, some in Greek garb, pushing through, and gathering round the thrones of* RHADAMANTHUS *and of* MINOS *to be judged.*

MINOS.

Whither away so fast, Aristodemus?

ARISTODEMUS.

To find Callicrates, and tell him all.

MINOS.

Callicrates stands here, awaiting sentence.
The gods who knew, delayed him till thou camest.

ARISTODEMUS.

Speak to thy friend, Callicrates!

CALLICRATES.

Speak thou.
My lips are sealed from speaking: yet I listen.

ARISTODEMUS.

Hear then the truth, O Minos, and thou, friend,
Whose love was dearer to my soul than life!

It was midsummer at Thermopylæ,
Where we three hundred with our lion king
Lay in the straits awaiting what should happen.
Then did the captain send me forth to seek
A privy passage through Trachinian hills:
For I was first of runners, stoutest-souled,
Men said, of athletes; and the love I bore
Callicrates, had crowned my name with honour.
So I, thus bidden, girt me; and could see,
Running, the vast barbarian host a-flood
From sea-beach unto hill-side, toward our host
Surging, that rock-like rose to stem the tide.
But I the mountains clove. A dry white gorge
Mid towering crags received me, and I ran
Hour after hour; until what time the noon
Flamed in mid ether and my strength was minished,
I came unto a barren scaur up-raised
Heaven-high above me. At its feet a pool
Lay slumbering smooth and blue as polished steel,
Broad each way as the temple steps that front
Queen Hera's shrine in Argos: and therefrom
Gushed a full stream pellucid, frothed and filled
Its rocky runlet, down the mountain side
Mid myrtles tumbling a thin silver thread.
There on my knees I bowed, and leaned, and drew

Draughts that refreshed my spirit, while above
Burned summer, and my brain with heat was heavy,
But when I rose—nay, listen; this is true—
There stood between me and the myrtle-boughs,
In blood-red chlamys like a boy arrayed,
One on whose lips persuasion sat, whose eyes
Flamed fiercer than the light of summer noon.
He in his hands forth stretched a pomegranate,
Ripe, ruddy to the core, and smiled, and said:
'If thou wouldst see Callicrates alive,
Eat this!' Then I, who long had served Love well,
Cried: 'Even so, Lord Erôs!' For I knew
How Pan unto Pheidippides vouchsafed
Mid vales Arcadian speech, what time he ran
From Athens to fair Sparta night and day:
And in my soul I deemed that Love had deigned
To smile on Hellas. So I took and ate
That cursèd fruit. Therewith deep slumber fell
Upon my drowsèd eyes; but ere I slept,
I seemed once more to see thee first as when
From pastoral Amyclæ thou didst join
The herd of Damocles, and quick as sight
Love, known not till that hour, leaped forth on me,
Bidding me fight with Brasidas to win
The right to shield thee. Thus once more in dreams
Thy plighting hand, Callicrates, was laid
Here on my hand, and men proclaimed us friends.—
How long I slept I know not. When I woke,
Night held the precincts of the starry sky,

And all around was silence, save the stream
That tinkled through the twilight to the sea.
At first methought I was on watch; and shame
Troubled my soul for truant sleep: then fear,
Mist-like and vague, o'er-swam this pain: then flashed
The fact of yester-noon, and clear to view,
The Hellenes mid their foes at fearful odds
Flamed up before me.—Shuddering, dazed, I ran,
Cold sweat from each limb gushing, till I came
Where a cleft cornice of the impendent hills
Gave sight of fields low-lying and dim sea
Now dawn-empurpled. Headlong thence I dashed,
Not loving life, nay loathing; yet my life
Seemed god-sustained in scorn: for still I ran,
Fleet-foot and firm.—My fruitless task performed,
At length I found Alpênoi. There I sank:
Knee knocked at knee; and in my breast the heart
Died, when I heard: 'Three hundred yesterday,
The flower of Sparta, perished! Not a man
Shall tell this tale in Sparta to his sire!'
Was I not then a man? Was I alone
Left of the men my comrades? At my side
Hung this broad blade, not stained as now with gore
Of Persians, but a virgin: how I yearned
To feel her sharpness bite my flesh, to die,
And be, though feigned, a hero! Yet some god
Cried in my ear: 'Beware! The shades below
Are not unwitting of the man who dies
Life-loathing: nor will he, thy lion king,

Whose hest thou hast betrayed, greet thee self-slain.
Live rather.'—So I lived. But how I came,
Lean, haggard, worn, the phantom of a man
On whom thick crimes weigh, after weary days
Of wanderings mid the voiceless hills alone,
Back to my homestead, boots it not to tell.—
Thou knowest, Callicrates! For thou didst couch
Not uncompanioned by Eurotas' tide,
That sultry summer evening; when I stood
With praying hands to thee who wert my friend.
Nought could I plead when men cried: 'Come again?
Craven, that from the pitched field slunk away!
Coward, that dared not die!' Nought could I plead,
When thou didst blush to own me, dash the tears
Like serpents from stung eyelids, stifle sighs
Within thy labouring breast where love lay dead:
For though my yearning soul bled drops of fire
To see thee sorrowing and to know thee shamed,
Yet was there nought for me to plead; my tale,
Witnessed by none who knew the king's command
Rang hollow like a fable, stirring scorn
On lips of women who had smiled to hear
Of sons or lovers pierced by Persian spears.—
Canst thou, Callicrates, the fair, the free,
Here in the jaws of Hades dare to reckon
What months were mine on bleak Taygetus,
Outcast, alone, despised, derided, shunned,
Cut off from sacraments of holy flames
And feasts in common, from paternal shrines

Cur-like with stones thrust forth, forbidden fire
From hearths that blazed for others, shelterless,
Without one word of mercy?—This was much:
Yet this I bore unmurmuring, for I knew
My heart was holy and the gods are great.—
But oh, to see thee on those winter eves,
Thee whom I loved; forth from my lair to slink,
And watch thee mid thy comrades round the shrine
Of Artemis or Erôs, like a moon
Mid brother-stars, in polished armour lead
Thy Pyrrhic, laughing! Then to cower and crouch
Sleepless, through long unconstellated gloom,
In snow and sleet, by cavern and by scaur!
I will not taunt thee. Yet how daredst thou yield
Thy very soul a precious priceless boon
To me who loved thee, then withhold thy faith,
Believing men, and what they spake to blight
Thy friend, nor take his word against the world?
Hadst *thou* come branded with a thousand stripes,
Dragged at the car-wheels of our lion king,
For theft apparent, falsehood, fear, such foulness
As turns the spirit sick to think upon it,
I would have sought thee out and clung to thee,
Hoping, believing, constant to the end!—
I thank ye, gods, I died not. Then it was
That death seemed sweet: then would I bare my blade,
And picture how at Hades' gate here sitting
Year after year, I would await thee; scan
The countless cohorts of the assembling dead;

Till thy turn came; then tell my tale where truth
Is known for truth, and bid thee bless thy friend.
Yet, for I felt it craven thus to die,
Because dear life was loveless and undone,
I clung to blank existence. On the edge
Of that alluring precipice which offers
Repose for souls unsatisfied, I hung,
Hugging my innocence, praying that heaven
Would save me for some purpose and the praise
Of Hellas. Therefore all that might avail
To make my vigour perfect; naked races
On rocks that are as hard as polished steel;
Breastings of swollen mountain streams; bare couches
'Neath frost and snow on stormy peaks; grim wrestlings
Unarmed with wolves and cavern-cradled bears;
Hungers and thirsts, self-smitten blows on back
And thigh and breast and shoulder—were my games,
My sad and solitary pastimes. Thus
The strength of ten men in my flesh was hardened,
As Persia now feels groaning. Then the day
Came when Pausanias should lead his troop
Of Spartans to Platæa. In a dream
Methought that Love cried to me: 'Better cheer!
Arise, for Hellas needs thee!' And so fair,
Awaking from that dream, was all the world,
That nought I doubted of the gods above;
But rose, and donned my arms, and sought the ranks
Smooth and well-shapen; not as one whom shame
Hath tettered to the core with craven sickness,

But like a conqueror from the games returned.
Thereat men marvelled: but some stood aside,
Crying: 'The coward! Comes he in our flock
To taint with foul infection flesh of ours?'
Others belike feeling the god in me,
Besought Pausanias that I might go,
Last, slave-like, least, unhonoured, to the field.—
Nay, listen lest for very grief I choke.—
The ranks were stationed, and the shrine of Erôs
Was duly raised of turf with smoking altars:
There stood Callicrates; fairest, men cried,
Of all the Hellenes under arms to-day;
Fairer I thought than sculptor or than poet
Hath carved or sung. Erect, with golden tresses
Rose-wreathed, he stood, and prayed, and made libation
Among the Irenes. Gods! within my veins
What fever of fierce life-blood pulsed to know
That he had been my comrade, that these arms,
Disjoined and desecrate of joy, had clasped
That demigod refulgent! Then a shout
Song-like along the lines made music. We
Turned to our arms. Pausanias mid his seers
Interrogating heaven, stayed motionless
Until the entrails unmistakeably
Should augur triumph. But the foemen rained
Arrows like hail upon our rattling targes.
Men too were bitten in the ranks, and blood
Stained snow-white breasts of strong Laconian spearmen.
Still frowned the priests uncertain. Eyes and ears,

Strained to the cracking point through all the host,
Made silence maddening. Even then I heard
An arrow from a purple-mantled Mede—
I marked the dog and slew him—hurtling pierce
Thy side, Callicrates!—Lo, where it bleeds!—
Then down the ranks ran: 'Dead! Callicrates
Is dying!' for they bore thee faint and fair,
Like Hyacinth whom Phœbus quoiting slew,
Forth to the tents; and in that moment shrill
Sang the war-trumpet cheering us to battle.
Then like a storm we rose and raced together,
Charging the foemen.—What was life to me?—
Belike they'll say in Sparta I was mad,
Desperate, hounded by hot shame to death!
I care not. Yet, if shame or grief had power
To chase this spirit from its home of clay,
Died had I on Taÿgetus. To life
And death I flew alike indifferent,
Since thou wert dead; and yet perchance to death
I leaned wish-laden, for I fain would find
Thee standing here before the throne as now,
That I might tell thee all.—Raging, I swept
Cohorts before me; and my cry was still
For Sparta: 'Mother Sparta, at thy need
Thy champion, though discrowned, dishonoured, does
What none hath dared before him!'—How I fell,
I knew not: for when first the fiery spirit
Drew her full gust of freedom, forth I sped
Hope-lured through mist, and found myself in Hades.—

See, I have spoken, Minos! This is truth,
Callicrates! I reck not what they say
There in that world forgotten. All I seek
Is that thy friend should pace Death's hall unshamed.

MINOS.

Enough! To hear thy tale the shades attend,
And Hades' house stands empty. Bless the powers
Who by dark ways have brought thee to bright ends:
For pain hath been for thee the fiery portal
To over-measure of perpetual bliss.
Purged spirit, take Callicrates. Enfold
His youth undying with undying arms.
Together sit at everlasting feast,
Telling the tales of heroes. This the gods,
Who judge not as men judge, award to thee.
And thou, Callicrates, be true to him
Throughout eternity, whose heart was given
In time a holocaust to love and thee.

CALLICRATES.

True unto thee?—For ever.—True to thee!

DREAM-PICTURES.

THE UNSEEN BEAUTY.

There fell upon my spirit years ago
In sleep the magic of a charm unspoken:
Since then I seek in vain that power to know,
Whose spell on heart and brain is still unbroken.

Only by night when dreams like snow-flakes cover
The painless forehead of unwrinkled youth,
When crime and anguish wake, sleep like a lover
Creeps to my side and flattery blends with truth.

Once more he tells the old delusive story
Which charmed me in the years now long since dead;
Once more I see the gleam, the grace, the glory;
Once more embrace the visionary head.

O love-pale face, which the sunlighted splendour
Of gold hair, mist-like, wreathes with radiancy;
O solemn eyes, ethereal and tender;
O limbs that grow and glow unceasingly!

Why come ye thus again to soothe my slumber
With ineffectual joy that dies at dawn?
Sad sorrows of my waking hours outnumber
The hopes that night, the usurer, keeps in pawn.

Thou art a dream, fair form, of loveliness,
Which never yet o'er earth in summer hovered,
Which the waves bore not, which no fathomless
Ocean of heaven to sight of men discovered.

Thou wert not, art not, and wilt never be;
With mortal loves thou hast nor place nor being;
I love thee not, nor sue for love from thee;
Feeling I feel thee not, nor see thee seeing.

Thou art a phantom such as human thought,
Bewildered by the world's exceeding wonder,
Weaves in its madness on the woof of nought—
We wake and find our old life rent asunder:

For never more shall soft strong woman's love,
Calm friendship, and mild airs of sunny weather,
Lakes, mountains, and the gloom of leafy grove,
The dancing seas, the bloom-empurpled heather,

Though dear, though true, though passionately sweet,
Give rest to him who seeks the unseen splendour:
Far off she dwells from track of mortal feet;
The powers that guard her home their charge will not surrender.

INCLUSAM DANAEN.

Oh, who hath found her,
And with fetters bound her?
Who hath beholden
Her tresses golden,
Or following after
Her subtle laughter,
Hath felt her splendour
Superbly tender,
Flooding the portal
Of hopes immortal?

Not they who never
From earth's joys sever;
Not they who tarry
To eat and marry;
Not they who fashion
Idols of passion;
Whom fumes of slumber
Fog-like encumber;
They have not found her,
Nor with fetters bound her.

But he who scorning
Chill dews of morning,
Fearing no terror
By night or error,

Hath climbed high mountains
Where leap her fountains,
Under pure ether
In cloudless weather;
Lo, he hath found her,
And with fetters bound her.

ὄναρ ὕπαρ.

I walk, I talk, like one asleep;
Mid men I am a dream:
Poppies for harvest sheaves I reap,
And drink of Lethe's stream:
Then what have I to do with thee,
Who art like sunshine blithe and free?

To dreams, a dream, I dreaming turn;
I live among the dead:
Their brows with pallid lustre burn—
Thy lips are fresh and red,
And in thine eyes and cheeks the light
Of youth and strength is morning-bright.

Shadow with shade, and dream with dream,
Night's children with the night:
But star with star, and beam with beam,
And light with living light:

For me the shadow-world; for thee
A sister sun thy bride to be.

O Night, O gracious mother, bend
  Thy forehead dark with dews:
Once more with thee I yearn to wend
  Those twilight avenues,
Where all the radiance of the day,
That tired my sight, grows cool and grey.

THE DESERT.

A young man in a barren land
Wandered, where shrubs on burning sand
  Clustered with dead-sea apples dry:
The ground beneath his feet was dust,
Shining with salt and scurf and crust:
  But, where the desert met the sky,

Rose domes that glimmered, fret and frieze
Sculptured on endless terraces,
  With pearly pyramid and palm;
All quivering in a silver haze,
Growing and fading 'neath the blaze
  Of light inexorably calm.

Then came a Spirit; one who trod
That land alone with Love and God;

Crying: 'If thou wert strong, O youth,
Those trees would bear thee fruit and flowers,
Those phantom palaces and bowers
Would prove an everlasting truth!'

The Spirit promised—but in vain.
The youth, possessed of aching pain,
Plucked apples dry as dust, that charred
His loathing lips, and saw the bright
Mirage dissolve in mist and light,
Leaving the sky-line sharp and hard.

So that he said: 'Poor Spirit, born
To be the butt of simple scorn!
Dwell in the wilderness, and taste
Apples with ashes at their core,
Deceived, deceiving evermore!
I turn and leave thee to the waste.'

Then too the Spirit went and trod
That land without or Love or God;
And all around him into cloud
Faded the unsubstantial show
Of palm and palace; till with woe
His head upon his breast was bowed.

Yet forasmuch as he was wrung
With pain surpassing mortal tongue,

Believing still beyond belief,
Nor resting, nor resigning life,
But struggling with continual strife,
God placed a limit to his grief:

For after many years there came
A day when earth dissolved in flame;
When neither dust nor sand nor sheen
Phantasmal seared his aching eyes,
But shining through the limpid skies
The City of the Lord was seen.

DAY-DREAMS.

I.

Lo, Music comes! who once with Love's own voice
Stirred my dull soul, and roused me to rejoice:
Now with a dreadful storm of tears unshed
She bows the discrowned anguish of my head;
And as she flies fire-footed with a roar
Of angry thunders on an unknown shore,
Wind-swept Atlantics of mad waves I see
Booming on sandy wastes continually:
The grey-green monsters, plumed with tawny spray,
Scream 'neath the north-blast at their awful play;
And dark as death, above the surf and surge,
Onward swift clouds their black battalions urge:

There on the dusky strand, stiff, stark, and cold,
A strong man drowned in solitude is rolled ;
Around him swells the mounded sand, and o'er
His head the flesh-crows croak along the shore.

II.

As one who long time musing o'er a lake
Where no light winds the filmy beryl break,
But snow-capped crags impending close the scene
With luminous shadows glassed upon the green,
May seem to see from depths so deep no hand
Of diver ever smote their silvery sand,
A drowned face rise, a shape of murdered joy,
The marble brows and bosom of a boy—
Smooth golden curls and golden tresses laid
Close upon cheek and throat and shoulder dead ;
Strong stainless limbs ; fair feet that were so fleet ;
Hands once so warm, and clay-cold lips so sweet :
Then, half in trance, again beholds the lake
One lustrous beryl that no light winds break ;
While through the waveless green, the shadowy grey
Of mirrored peak and forest, fade away
Ever more faint the white face and the form
That sleep far down beyond or sun or storm :
So, even so, to me Lord Erôs came,
Ringed with white radiance of a wasted flame,—
Drowned, cold, and dead, who once was wont to thrill
My life of life with joy ineffable,—

Dead, drowned, and cold, forgotten and forgone,
With marvellous pale lips and forehead wan,—
Cold, dead, and drowned beneath the massy lake
Of sloth and slumber that no light winds shake;—
Swam upward through the glassy waves, and sank
Leaving the smooth waves still more glassy-blank.

OBLIVION.

Among the poppies by the well
  Of Lethe where I weary lay,
Upon my soul a slumber fell,
  Making the light of summer grey;
Nepenthé, too, I ate of him,
Whose eyes are eyes of Seraphim.

But ere I slept, while still it seemed
  That sleep was a delicious thing,
The splendour of a vision streamed
  Above the poppy heads that fling
Their drowsy juice and drowsy scent
Through blood and brain with ravishment.

For there He stood whose eyes are eyes
  Of Seraphim: and lo! his lips
Seemed quivering with the winds of sighs;
  And all his forehead in eclipse

Burned not, but showered well-heads of tears
Amid the deserts of dead years.

Yea, and his heart fed living fire ;
  And both his cheeks, like ashes wan,
Were cinders of a spent desire
  For lack of food to feed upon :
Therewith the Spirit smiled and spake
Words sweet as breath from buds that break :

'I go ; take now, dear soul, thy rest !
  Slumber beneath the poppy-flowers !
The mole within her winter nest
  Be not so folded from sad hours
As thou, who of the thought of me
Eatest nepenthé wearily.

'I go ; but when thy dream is o'er,
  When thou awakest cold perchance,
And haply from sleep's golden door
  Gazest upon the drear expanse
Of barren years and vacant life
And long monotony of strife,

'Think then of me : though hence I go ;
  Though I am withered, worn and old,
With waiting, praying, weeping through
  Long days that shiver in the cold
Of thy scant love ; yet will I come,
And, when thou callest, bear thee home.'

He spake ; and fire with sudden pain
  Flashed in his face. Then slumber fell
Upon my lids like summer rain ;
  And through faint dreams the terrible
Flame of that head, of those wild eyes,
Died ; and my sleep was Paradise.

THE DREAM.

Fair dream, false dream, com'st thou again,
Sweet, soft, and still as southern rain,
To melt my soul and stir my brain ?

More lingering than melodies
Wherein the breath of music dies,
Love-sick with its own phantasies ;

More full of yearning than the star
That pales before day's fiery car,
And fading feels him from afar ;

More deep than evening's amber skies,
When angels dart their dreaming eyes
Through half-awakened galaxies !

Why comest thou ? Have I not learned
To quench the fire that ever burned,
To still the sense that ever yearned ?

Sleep is an artist. He can bind
Vague longings that distract the mind,
To forms by love and life defined.

A thousand wishes are to him
The soul of one self-sprighted whim,
Swift as the flight of seraphim.

Grief's solitary source of tears,
Youth wasting idly with the years,
Wants, hopes, desires, unrest, and fears,

Sleep soothes with visions that caress,
With draughts of wonder-working bliss
Drawn from the strife of souls that kiss.

And in his Circe-cup he brews
The purity of morning dews,
The charm of summer's hundred hues:

All fair forms that have life and breath
Between the doors of birth and death;—
The beauty-bloom that vanisheth;

Dim stars that rise, and stars that sink;
Larks singing sightless on heaven's brink;
Pale hands that parting lovers link;

A branch of myrtle by the bay;
Tall terraced hills with olives grey;
Faint bells half heard at break of day;—

Sleep weaves into one dream to snare
The soul with pleasure frail as air,
Commingling strange things sweet and rare.

And then sleep fails. In rash surprise
We start, and straining widowed eyes
Gaze up into the barren skies.

Come back ! Come back ! we vainly groan.
Far, far away love's form hath flown ;
And, faint as youth's departing moan,

We hear our own quick pulses beat,
The stirring of the drowsy street,
The tramp of dull unheeded feet.

A FRAGMENT.

Come not to wake again
The old sad dream of pain,
To smile and weep :
Your melancholy eyes,
Your soft remembered sighs,
Oh, let them sleep.

LIKE AS A DREAM WHEN ONE AWAKETH.

False dream, ill dreamed, of erring fancy bred!
Fair poisonous shape with poppies round thy head!
Too late I know thee, now thy charms are fled.

O who the true from false shall disentangle?
O who, say who, when mingled voices wrangle,
Shall draw forth tune from sweet and harsh that jangle?

Not I, not I, mocked by a magic vision,
Befooled and blinded by the vain misprision
Of gross terrestrial shapes for forms Elysian.

Not I, in whom sense and pure spirit mingle,
Whose soul and flesh indissolubly tingle,
In whom no wish, no aim, no hope is single.

Grasping at Beauty's self, I clutch a Satyr;
Seeking to sublimate the dross of matter,
I raise false fiends that cheat and lie and flatter.

Break then thy wand, poor Prospero! Be not fain
To make beast Caliban the part sustain
Of airy sprites that mock thy mongrel reign!

THE LOTOS-GARLAND OF ANTINOUS.

THE LOTOS-GARLAND OF ANTINOUS.

Behold a vision of the world-old Nile—
Of porch and palace-tower and peristyle
Glassed in the oily current smooth and calm,
With many a fringéd mile of sultry palm
Shimmering in noonday sunlight! O the roar
Of the full-voiced swart-visaged swarming shore,
As the gilt barge, with flash of oars, and cry
Cast on the waters of shrill minstrelsy,
Down the broad tide bears Adrian the king,
Lapped in luxurious ease and winnowing
All husk of hard thought from his heart this day—
So men surmise—to laughter given and play!

Lo the full sails of Tyrian silk out-spread
Like wings of wildest plumage overhead;
The cedar masts with crusted pearl and scale
Of Indian beetle rough; the bellying veil,
Star-sprent, gold-dusted, hyaline in hue,
That tempers like a mist the burning blue
Of those bronzed heavens; the heavy-scented flowers,
Plucked from what dim mysterious temple bowers
Deep in the dewy twilight—tuberoses,

Starred jasmines, lotos, crimson chalices
With myrtles woven ! Mid that bloomy sea
Are girls, half-seen, reclining dreamily ;
Some white as swans unruffled, pure and cold ;
Some glowing with the delicate dim gold
Of amber, warm on throat and neck beneath
Black heavy coils of lustrous curls that wreathe,
Snake-like, smooth temples. O the subtle stir
Of laughter and of little feet, the whir
Of fans like night-moths fluttering, mid the wild
Voices of choiring boys, that naked piled
On Persian broidery, to the sound of flute,
Viol and fife and soul-subduing lute,
Make music, piercing shrill and sad and clear
With yearning memories the drowsy ear !

On glides the flashing galley. But the king,
In Roman strength austere, each goodly thing
Serenely reckons. He hath felt the glare
Of shadeless deserts ; by the Libyan lair
Of lions hath out-watched the fiery day,
Patiently waiting for his royal prey :
The clash of arms he knows, the thirsty march
O'er sands with wormwood set, where fevers parch
Black lips and tongue, and hollow eyes grow dim :
No Syrian wreath or crown of rose for him
The circlet of the Empire ! And behold,
This morn in Theban temples dusk with gold,
While spiry flames from smoking altars flew,
And incense clouds voluminously blue

Sun-proof involved those columned aisles, the seer
Foaming with eyes fixed on the unseen Fear,
A rede of death enwrapped in riddling gloom
Had uttered:—yea, that even for him the doom
Of icy death, unless some spirit free
Of man or boy, unbought, might willingly
Yield life for life, amid the dance and feast,
When hollow-eyed grim Death seems last and least,
Lurked shadow-like. So spake the shuddering priest.
And Adrian heard; yet trembled not, but read
As in a book the doom of Rome dismemberèd:
For on his life alone the Empire hung;
And to his single strength the nations clung,
As clings a vine with leaves and weighty fruit
To some strong pine's stone-circling massy root.

And none but Adrian heard –save one who stayed
Beside him; one in whose quick pulses played
Fire of free life imperious; a boy
Of nineteen summers, framed for power and joy.
Crisp on his temples curled the coal-black hair;
White myrtle flowers and leaves were woven there:
His eyes had solemn light in them, and shone
Flame-like 'neath cloudy brows: his cheeks were wan
With passion; and the soul upon his lips,
Smouldering like some fierce planet in eclipse,
Breathed fascination terrible and strong,
As though quick pride strove with remembered wrong.
But oh! what tongue shall tell the orient glow
Of those orbed breasts, smooth as dawn-smitten snow;

The regal gait, processional and grand,
As of a god; the sunny-marble hand,
Grasping a silk-enwoven cedar-wand?—
He heard, Antinous! and in his breast
His heart leaped, and his flaming eyes confessed
The fervour of his spirit; still and calm
Standing the while, like some full-fruited palm
Tall by a river-bank. Then forth they went,
The youth divine and royal victim, blent
In silent awe and blind bewilderment.
Down to the Nile they came, and eager men
Pressed round them myriad-voiced with wonder: then
Taking their barge, upon the stream sailed forth,
Downwards all day steering by West and North.

All day the lazy ripple to the prow
Whispered; and all day long by palms arow,
By cities populous with blazing quays,
By tracts of flowering bean and verdant maize,
They glided. Towers and temples sunny bright,
Like mirage in the desert, swam from sight
Behind them; and the wild tumultuous noise
Of nations shouting with a single voice
Grew fainter on the current. All day long,
Lulled to a slumberous symphony of song,
Sails flapped, oars flashed, and boys and maidens made
Cool music in the silken scented shade.
But Adrian dreaming lay, and at his side
Antinous with large eyes blank and wide
Lay dreaming. Thus adown the sleepy tide,

As in a trance toward Lethe through still air,
Lost to the joy of living did they fare.

But now the sun who all day long had driven
His glittering chariot o'er the enamelled heaven,
Began to wester. Level smote his rays,
A furnace-fire of splendour ; and the blaze
Burned upon stream and city : in its fire
The pillared shrine and solitary spire,
Tall cypress or thick tamarisk-tangle, swam
Like clouds you scarce can see amid the flame
Of sunset ; and the whole vast concave through,
Across the light-irradiate airy blue,
Ran conflagration. Then, ere day was dead,
The slaves who had that service came and spread
The Emperor's table ; and Antinous rose,
For his it was before the banquet's close
To bear the wine-cup, at his master's knee
Like Ganymede serving imperially.

He rose, and from his shoulder's ivory
The veil fell fluttering to his rounded thigh :
Naked he stood ; then on his forehead set
A crimson wreath of lotos, cool and wet,
Fresh from the tank, with ivy mixed ; and bound
Roses about his breast ; and from the ground
A tendril-tangled thyrsus raised, and flung
The quivering leaves aloft that clasped and clung.
Next half the lustre of his limbs he hid,
Like some night-reveller or Bassarid

Fresh-flown from Indian thickets, with the fur
Of panthers streaked and spotted, sleek with myrrh
And musky-fragrant. In his hand a bowl,
Carved of one beryl, soft as if a soul
Throbbed in its flush, he took, and called his crew.
They to their Bacchus with loud laughter flew,
Tossing flame faces, twinkling tiny feet
In measured madness to the timbrel's beat—
Wild hair behind them flying, loosened zone,
And flowers about their flanks for girdles strewn.
Girls were they, girls with vine-leaves garlanded,
Or jasmines white as their own maidenhead!
Boys too; ye gods, the beauty of those boys,
Lithe as young leopards! the soul-thrilling noise
Of their shrill voices!—Bells are at their feet,
And silver armlets, tinkling as they meet,
Make the air mad.

Behold, in such wild glee,
With dance and music and with witchery,
Paced forth the youth, for whom it seemed that all
His life to come might be one festival.
Yet in his soul was sadness. Well he knew
That ere those lotos-flowers had lost their dew,
He forth would fare upon the dismal way
Of dying.—Thus of many thoughts that day
This one had triumphed: he would die to shield
Adrian from death, if so the doom revealed
By god-sent oracles might be withdrawn
From that great head.—Like Phosphor in the dawn,

Solemn he was and tender; larger eyed,
Of more majestic stature; and his wide
Bare bosom swelled with nobler weight of thought
Than e'er within his heart had yet been wrought,
Since from his fields Bithynian and the play
Of childhood, on a lustrous night of May,
He had been borne by pirate hands, and woke
To weep his mother.

Through the awning broke
The clear-voiced choir; but Adrian in good sooth
Rose from his pillowed couch to greet the youth,
So proudly paced he: and the dying sun,
Shooting that moment from low vapours dun,
Transfigured all his face; and in the glow
The ruddy lotos-flowers upon his brow
Blazed ruby-like, and all his form divine
Blushed into crimson, and the crystalline
Bowl of the gleaming beryl flashed, and dim
With dusky gold the fur that mantled him,
Spread tawny splendour. So he stood and smiled,
Bending his crowned head, like a god who, mild
To mortals, will be worshipped. Such a sight,
So framed, so sphered in music and sunlight,
Had ne'er in court or theatre or grove
Fashioned by Nero for his insolent love,—
Nay ne'er in Syrian valleys where the Queen
Mourns for her lost Adonis, on the green
Of Daphnè or of sea-girt Tyre been seen.

He spake : 'To thee, in semblance of a god,
To thee supreme, who Jove-like with thy nod
Scatterest states and kingdoms, lo ! I come
Bearing strong juice of Bacchus. See the foam
Leaps in the crystal for thy lips, and red
As rose or maiden in her bridal bed,
Glows for thy kisses ! Health for thee, my king,
Health and long life within the cup I bring.
Yea, were it mine, this youth thou thinkest fair,
(Fair in thy thought, for verily whate'er
Thine eyes have praised, is fairest,) were it mine,
Brief as it is, scarce worth one thought of thine,
(For lo, it blooms to-day, to-morrow dies,
Nay even now is fading, as the skies
Fade after sunset)—were it mine to give,
Thinkest thou, king and master, I would live?
Were it not well to die for thee, and know
There in the scentless myrtle bowers below,
That thou wert living this new life? What breath,
How sweet soe'er, were sweeter than such death?
Nay, Lord, I flatter not. This is no smile
Of hollow semblance on false lips to wile
Kind speech from thee, much prized by us who serve :
For could I, from this will I would not swerve !'

Thus spake Antinous, and the table round
Murmured approval ; for the honeyed sound
From those calm lips on idle ears like dew
Fell with fresh fragrance and a pleasure new.

Sophists were there, whom Adrian fed, and they
Clapped loud applause, averring the long day
Had kept till eve her flower of perfect speech :
For such fine flattery, like the perfumed peach
Most subtly flavoured, could no palate cloy.
Thus clamoured they, wine-wanton ; but the boy,
Bending his lilied brow beneath the wand,
And kneeling to his master, with one hand
Lifted the cup :—a lotos falling stirred
The wine refulgent ; then, without a word
Or smile, he raised the sunlight of his face.
But Adrian drank, keeping the flower to grace
His wreath ; and bade Antinous take the bowl
Of beryl. Then he turned with graver soul
To some grey counsellor beside him placed ;
And the cup-bearer with his revel passed
Forth from the tent imperial.
Lo, the West
Bathing with liquid lustre brow and breast—
Lustre of orange, amber, green and blue,
Glassed on the waves, and gemlike in the dew
Of heaven translucent ; the cool breeze that flew
Past silken sail and tent-roof ; the black bars
Of palm-groves and of porches ; shimmering stars,
And the low moon to eastward, pearly pale
Mid roseate refluence ! In one woven veil
Of varied hues the universal world
Seemed by some hand omnipotent enfurled,

Where in the midst the barge, a moving spark
Herself of light, yet mid such splendour dark,
Slept on her shadow. And was this the night,
Centre of all things fair, for thee to blight
Thy blossom with cold frost of death—to die,
Sweetest of all sweet things beneath the sky?

The decks were vacant, as at even-tide
Of chills and sudden dew-fall. Free and wide
The sandal planks thick-matted with bright wool
And furs and flowered embroideries beautiful,
Spread for his pacing; and the lazy plash
Of rippling waves that round the galley wash,
Cooled the clear air. He went as in a dream
Forth to the prow, and o'er the luminous stream
Leaned; and behold, a golden lamp up-borne
By Isis (on her brow the sacred horn,
And at her waist the lotos, leaf by leaf,
And flower by flower, twined in a jewelled sheaf
Of lilies) cast a glimmer pure as pearl
On the veined marble of the watery swirl.
Here stayed Antinous, while the darkening west
Deepened from crimson into amethyst,
From fire to blood-red orange thin and still,
Under faint streaks of tenderest daffodil
Which faded. Soon, as drops of fiery dew
Gleam on a withered primrose, so there grew
Forth from this pallor the intensest glow
Of Hesper's love-star: tremulous and low,

Poised o'er the palms, he panted ; and his beam
Danced like a living lamp upon the stream.

Then spake Antinous : 'My hour is nigh!
Night cometh, and the guardians of the sky
Illume their cressets!' So he rose and spread
The panther skin and thyrsus, and the red
Wreath of dead lotos laid upon the ground :
Next in his hand the bowl of beryl, crowned
With roses, from a gleaming golden jar
He filled ; and gazing at the level star,
Thrice made libation, crying : 'Father Nile,
And Isis and Osiris! ye who smile
On mortal births and burials! lo, I give
My life for Adrian's! Wherefore should I live?
Have I not learned to trail my manhood's pride
In the world's golden gutters?—Like a bride,
Sumptuous with sacrifice and pomp and choir,
Forth from the doors I issued ; and the fire
Of Flamens shone to light me : now, alone,
With saffron veil unbound and broken zone,
My blossom withered, lo, a wanton's doom
Awaits me, or the purifying tomb!—
Nay, even now I weary. Day by day
It irks me to consume the hours with play ;
Hearing soft speeches, propped on pillowed down,
To gather smiles ; or, when I choose to frown,
Drink womanish tears. Better I ween were strife
With lions than this fulsome flower of life!

And when the flower is faded, what remains?
Yea, heaven, I thank thee: lo, the little pains
Of dying bring me guerdon of great gains!
For in my bloom I perish, having bought
Unending honour. What I give, is nought
But a mere piece of boyhood thrown away:
While he, the Emperor, lives. Even so. This day
Dates a new æon in the age of Rome;
Wherethrough, a name for ever, in the dome
Of people's praises, I shall pace, and be
Equalled with heroes in mine infamy!
Nay, what on earth more godlike? I have heard
Of soldiers dying at a general's word;
Of patriots who drained their hearts to save
A nation: they beside their fathers' grave,
Before their city walls and smoking shrines,
Fell on the long resounding foeman's lines
And perished: this was easy; yet they bore
Victorious crowns and hymns for evermore.
But I, what city or what home have I?
What duty, dear or sacred, bids me die?
A slave—the toy and bauble of a king,
Picked from the dust to play with—a cheap thing,
Irksome as soon as used—a cup to sip,
Then fling with loathing from the sated lip!—
Therefore I die more nobly. Where are ye,
My father and my mother, and the glee
Of brothers and of sisters, who were dear
Far off in years forgotten? Not one tear

Shall your calm unfamiliar eyes let fall
For me.—How like a gilded dream is all
The life that I have lived in glorious Rome!
How like a dream it leaves me!—Lo, I come,
Ye awful, soul-exacting, pitiless Powers!
Prepare your laurels and the moony bowers
Of myrtles! Not ignoble, not a slave,
I perish, but of mine own will, to save
The Father of the Empire.—I have seen
In Roman theatres the dying queen
Of weak Admetus, pale Polyxena,
Cheiron, Menoikeus; and the people, ah!
The people how they shouted! Tears and cries
Greet even an actor when he nobly dies:—
Will not the people of the unnumbered dead,
Showering their pallid crowns upon my head,
Nobly receive me noble, dying thus,
Calm in my strength, young, proud, luxurious,
Not torn by pangs, not wasted, not outworn,
But in my splendour?'
As he spake, a horn
Shrilled through the twilight; and he saw the tower
Of Besa, where that night they tarried, lower
Dusk o'er the champaign. Speechless from the bark
He dropped: she onward glided o'er the dark
Breast of the glimmering Nile with lamp and light:
He through the mirrors of the cool black night
Unruffled, dying drifted; and his death
Was seen by no man. Nay, there lingereth

Old legend in the town Antinoë,
Called by his name, a fair town and a free,
How that a flight of eagles from the sky
Down swooping, bore him, rosy breast and thigh
Lustrous like lightning on their sable plumes,
Up to the zenith, where, a star, he blooms
In that bright garden of the grace of Jove,
The martyr and the miracle of love.—
Of this the truth we know not; but we know
That in the town of Besa, where the flow
Of Nile is stayed upon the eastern bank
With wattles and with osiers, for a tank
That draws therefrom through sluices deep and wide
The living waters of the sacred tide,
There in the morn was found as though asleep,
The perfect body of the boy; and deep
Around him, known not till that day, there grew
Great store of lotos flowers, red, white, and blue,
But mostly rose-red, flaming in his hair,
And o'er his breast and shoulders floating fair,
And with his arms enwoven, pure and cool,
Screening his flesh from sunrise. Thus the pool
Burned with a miracle of flowers; but he,
Raised on their petals, pillowed tenderly,
And curtained with fresh leaves innumerous,
Smiled like a god, whom errands amorous
Lure from Olympus, and coy Naiads find
Sleeping, and in their rosy love-wreaths bind.

SONNETS

ON

THE THOUGHT OF DEATH.

SONNETS ON THE THOUGHT OF DEATH.

I

Who hath not dreamed, amid this toilsome life,
Of tranquil spirits fallen upon sleep,
Sighing—'Dear Death! they have no pain who keep
Sabbath in thy mild realm withdrawn from strife?'
But when the heart-blood ebbs, when day by day
Our own thin fingers grow more pinched and white,
When the starved nerves are thirsting for the light,
We mourn—'O Life that leaves us, strong Life, stay!
Give back once more the throb, the pulse, the pain!
Nay, if it need be, rend and torture us:
But leave us not to languish!'—Even thus,
Between the boon of life and the grave's gain,
There is a dreadful moment, ere the brain
Sinks into nothing spent and slumberous.

II

How is it that the thoughts of Love and Death
Are so indissolubly blent that Love,
When first he wings the soul to soar above
The prison-house wherein she languisheth,
Calls with the strength of morning in his breath,
And in his eyes the calm pure light thereof,
On Death—as though Death only knew what Love
In his clear cry, far above singing, saith?
Death answers.—Hark! Yon surly sullen knell
Swings o'er the sward where lovers hand in hand
Stroll mid forget-me-nots from glade to glade:
Through tears they smile and listen where they stand,
The while that low note of the booming bell
Saith to their soul: 'With me Love shall not fade!'

III

Deep calleth unto deep: the Infinite
Within us to the Infinite without
Cries with an inextinguishable shout,
In spite of all we do to stifle it.
Therefore Death in the coming gloom hath lit
A torch for Love to fly to. Dread and Doubt
Vanish like broken armies in the rout,
When the swords splinter and the hauberks split.
But in the interval of crossing spears
There is a stagnant dark, where all things seem
By frauds encompassed and confused with fears:
Herein we live our common lives, and dream;
Yet even here, remembering Love, we may
Look with calm eyes for Death to summon day.

IV

Can dissolution build? Shall death amend
Chaos on chaos hurled of human hope,
Co-ordinate our effort with our scope,
And in white light the hues of conflict blend?—
Alas! we know not where our footsteps tend:
High overhead the unascended cope
Is lost in ether, while we blindly grope
Mid mist-wreaths that the warring thunders rend.—
Somehow, we know not how; somewhere, but where
We know not; by some hand, we know not whose,
Joy must absorb the whole wide world's despair.
This we call Faith: but if we dare impose
Form on this faith, we shall but beat the air
Or build foundations on the baseless ooze.

V

Yea, many cities have been builded there—
The Sybaris and Croton of dead creeds,
Where now the Nereids hang their filmy weeds,
And 'neath the sand the slain gods slumber fair.
None stirs their sleep with praise or any prayer;
For a young god is reigning, and he leads
Our faint eyes upward from the flowery meads,
As though to greet an angel unaware.
He too shall sink and sleep. Age after age
Invents new saviours and new deities,
Crying Hosannah! while the withered page
Of mortal life blackens with blood and sighs;
Nor all our loves nor all the wars we wage,
Can lift us to the cold unpitying skies.

VI

Will death be outlet for us into light
And peace and plenitude of happiness?
Shall we grasp all things which we do but guess?
Or shall we lie lost in a starless night?
Or by slow upward strivings infinite
Shall we plod on, for ever comfortless,
For ever ringed with impotent distress,
And fooled as now with many a vain delight?
Shall we ourselves survive, or do we live
Enfolded in a life that is not ours,
Flaming like sparks intense but fugitive
To make the whole vast sea of splendour glow?
Shall we gain insight; or the more we know,
Still find new limits for our widening powers?

VII

Will not the large life of the Universe
Fulfil its children?—Haply 'twere enough
Like April snakes to cast the treacherous slough
Of fleshly stupors that the soul immerse.
Who knows if Death, miscalled the primal curse,
Be not life's crown of blessings? Stern and rough,
His breath perchance will sever at a puff
The birth-bred vapours that our sun amerce.
The self that binds thought, feeling, flesh in one,
Is form, not matter; nay, whate'er we see,
Hath form; blank matter is a name or nought.
Shall then each point of vital unity
Perish? Or shall new webs of life be spun
To clasp it quivering in the skein of thought?

VIII

These questions all men ask; but none can make
Fit answer for their anguish here below.
The howling whirlwinds of existence blow
Onward for ever o'er an endless lake:
We watch the struggling barks around us take
Their fated course; and that is all we know;
They sail, they sink; no sign the waters show;
While straining myriads follow in our wake.
The force that speeds our flight we cannot see:
No voice of man or God survives the storm;
Nor mid the weltering waves hath any form
Risen to fill the vast vacuity:
Nay, if at times there stream athwart the night
Some forkéd flame, it dazzles but to blight.

IX

Onward for ever flows the tide of Life,
Still broadening, gathering to itself the rills
That made dim music in the primal hills,
And tossing crested waves of joy and strife.
We watch it rising where no seeds are rife,
But fire the elemental vortex fills;
Through plant and beast it streams, till human wills
Unfold the sanctities of human life.
Further we see not. But here faith joins hands
With reason: life that onward came to us
From simple to more complex, still must flow
Forward and forward through far wider lands:—
If thought begins with man, the luminous
Kingdom of mind beyond him still must grow.

X

Is there then hope that thou and I shall be
Saved from the ruin of the ravenous years,
And placed, though late, at last among our peers
On the firm heights of immortality?
Nay, not so. Thought may burn eternally,
And beacon through ten thousand broadening spheres,
Using our lives like wood that disappears
In the fierce flame it feeds continually.
Thus we may serve to build the cosmic soul
As moments in its being: but to deem
That we shall therefore grow to grasp the whole,
Or last as separate atoms in the stream
Of Life transcendent, were a beauteous dream,
Too frail to bear stern reason's strong control.

XI

Yet Hope, cast back on Feeling, argues thus:—
If thought be highest in the scale we see,
That thought is also personality,
Conscious of self, aspiring, emulous.
Growth furthermore means goodness: nought in us
Abides and flourishes, unless it be
Tempered for life by love's vitality:
Evil is everywhere deciduous.
Shall then the universal Thought, pure mind,
Pure growth, pure good, be found impersonal?
And if a Person, dare we think or call
Him cruel, to his members so unkind
As to permit our agony, nor bind
Each flower Death plucks into Life's coronal?

XII

Ah foolish Hope! How many flowers have faded
Long ere the petals of their prime were spread;
How many on dry earth their bloom have shed,
By blight deformed, by canker-worms invaded!
To arch these aisles, these labyrinths colonnaded,
That soar so light and lustrous overhead,
To build these domes that echo to our tread,
How many million men have died unaided!
Each stone of this huge house of human thought
Was hewn with sweat and sighs, with blood and tears
Cemented, by dumb children of blind years,
Toiling instinctively and terror-fraught,
Mid anguish and intolerable fears,
Nor knowing what their bleeding hands had wrought.

XIII

Shall these arise winged by immortal mind,
Who toiled on earth obscure and vegetive?
If life be prescient thought's prerogative,
They can but die whose germ of thought was blind.—
Sightless and mute, leaving no trace behind,
See them whirl past like mists the breezes weave,
Blurred forms, and faces undemonstrative,
Blown by the blank and elemental wind.—
First founders of our race, the name whereby
God knows you in the place of death and hell,
Is legion! Numberless they hurry by,
Growing more vaporous; till who shall tell
If those last shapes be men,—those clouds that fly
'Twixt lurid lights and glooms inscrutable?

XIV

Nor these alone perplex me: but I see
The multitudes of babes untimely slain;
The phalanx of bleared idiots in whose brain
Echo is dumb; the blank-eyed company
Of self-imbruted slaves, whose atrophy
Sinks the blunt spirit beneath sense of pain;
The serfs of crime and labour who remain
Lost mid our daylight in dull misery:
All who through fault of self or circumstance,
Through sin of parents or through primal flaw,
Live stunted, dwarfed, foredoomed to ignorance,
Perverse, abortive, swerving from the law,
Twy-formed, twy-natured, crude, corrupted, raw—
How can these claim a God's inheritance?

XV

Deliverance may reach them from the wrong
Of Life—but not such salvage as we crave
From the cold clutch of Death's congealing wave
Into a land of warmth and morning song.
Is this then all wherefor we dare to long?
Is rest the end—rest in the silent grave,
For king and clown, fool, sage, and saint and knave,
Whelmed in one nameless, dateless, rankless throng?
Not even thus would the huge wrongs of life
Be righted: for annihilation is not peace,
Nor sleep, nor passiveness, nor truce to strife;
All these imply something that doth not cease:
Nor by obliterating man shall God
Straighten the paths whereon man's feet have trod.

XVI

If God exist, justice demands that He
Should compensate the pains of earth, redress
The balance of unequal happiness,
And mould aright mis-shaped monstrosity.
The time hath long gone by since man could bless
A monarch throned above a sapphire sea,
With seraphim for songsters, smilingly
Surveying earth and all earth's helplessness.
But when we prate of God, what do we mean?
Our age that hath so many faiths outworn,
Outlived so many longings on the scene
Of human hopes and human agony,
Waits a new reading of that Name, forlorn
And wrapped in dreamings of the things to be.

XVII

Perchance our sons shall learn to cling to Him,
As scarce less impotent than we, who will
But cannot, tempest-tossed by passions still,
And thwarted by blind force and anguish grim.
It may be they will need no teraphim
To pray to, but will take the good and ill
With calm indifference, content to fill
Their place and pass into the twilight dim.
Nay, peradventure they shall thrill with joy,
Feeling the pulse of the huge Being throb,
Divining God in forces that destroy
And build afresh, praising the years that rob
And years that yield, dizzy and drunk with bliss
By gazing on the infinite abyss.

XVIII

This also were a creed. Less amorous
Than Nature was grim Baal or Juggernaut:
Nor have the sons of Zion chaunted aught
Richer with love divine, more rapturous,
Than that thanksgiving chorus borne to us
Across dead years from marshes fever-fraught,
Where the Imperial Stoic waked and wrought
Mid the wild din of legions mutinous.
Nature will then usurp on Deity;
And with the shadow of the God we fear,
The dread of life to come will disappear.—
Oh! without God shall Love or Reason be?
Lacking the hope of life, how cold and drear
Must be the joys of poor mortality!

XIX

One saith, 'The world's a stage: I took my seat;
I saw the show; and now 'tis time to rise.'
Another saith, 'I came with eager eyes
Into life's banquet-hall to drink and eat:
The hour hath struck, when I must shoe my feet,
And gird me for the way that death-ward lies.'
Another saith, 'Life is a bird that flies
From dark through light to darkness, arrowy-fleet.'
One show; one feast; one flight;—must that be all?
Could we unlearn this longing, could we cry,
'Thanks for our part in life's fair festival!
We know not whence we came, we know not why
We go, nor where; but God is over all!'
It would not then be terrible to die.

XX

One saith: the whole world is a Comedy
Played for the mirth of God upon his throne,
Whereof the hidden meanings will be known
When Michael's trumpet thrills through earth and sea.
Fate is the dramaturge; necessity
Allots the parts; the scenes, by nature shown,
Embrace each element and every zone
Ordered with infinite variety.—
Another saith: no calm-eyed Sophocles
Indites the tragedy of human doom,
But some cold scornful Aristophanes,
Whose zanies gape and gibber in thick gloom,
While nightingales, shrill mid the shivering trees,
Jar on the silence of the neighbouring tomb.

XXI

Hush, heart of mine! Nor jest nor blasphemy
Beseems the strengthless creature of an hour!
Wed resignation rather; dread the power,
Whate'er it be, that rules thy destiny.
Nay, learn to love; love irresistibly!
With obstinate reiteration shower
Praises and prayers, thy spirit's dearest dower,
On the mute altar of that deity!
They work no wrong who worship: they are pure
Who seek God even in the sightless blue:
And they have hope of victory who endure.
This mortal life, like a dark avenue,
Is leading thee perchance to light secure
And limitless horizons clear to view.

A PALINODE.

Lux est umbra Dei.

Nay, Death, thou art a shadow! Even as light
  Is but the shadow of invisible God,
  And of that shade the shadow is thin Night,
  Veiling the earth whereon our feet have trod;
So art Thou but the shadow of this life,
  Itself the pale and unsubstantial shade
  Of living God, fulfilled by love and strife
  Throughout the universe Himself hath made:
And as frail Night, following the flight of earth,
  Obscures the world we breathe in, for a while,
  So Thou, the reflex of our mortal birth,
Veilest the life wherein we weep and smile:
  But when both earth and life are whirled away,
  What shade can shroud us from God's deathless day?

THE MEETING OF DAVID AND JONATHAN

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All day the battle raged. Ere eventide
Came Abner to the tent of Saul, and cried:
'Would'st thou this eve, O king, behold the boy
Whose single arm turned Israel's grief to joy?'
'Yea!' spake the king. So Abner bowed, and went
Forth to the sunlight from the shadowy tent;
And on his spear leaned Jonathan to greet,
With Saul, the coming of victorious feet.

A little space was silence, while the king
Bowed his huge forehead black and pondering:
But Jonathan, with eager eyes, afire
Because of this great deed, in strong desire
Gazed at the tent-door. Then a sound was heard
Of one who swiftly ran, yet scarcely stirred
The withered grass on the parched sward without:
And far away thundered the people's shout.

The curtain rose: in poured the ruddy sun
Sphering a slender stripling, dim and dun
Amid that glory, like an olive tree
High on a hill-top you can hardly see

For all the fire behind it. Round his hair,
Flaming like gold, God set the golden glare—
A coronal whereof the radiance smote
Saul's eyes; and in the centre, like a mote,
Swam the sweet boy's face, marvellously wan
With wonder and with awe for thinking on
The miracle his sling and stone had wrought:
Since now the deed was grown a thing for thought
To feed on, much he pondered how the Lord
Had stayed him trusting not to spear or sword.
Yea, in his hand the hideous bulk he swung,
With shattered forehead, and with stiffening tongue
Thrust through those spasm-tortured lips of death,
Seemed like a shape of dreams that vanisheth
When we awake, and lo, the morn is new
O'er field and forest in the birth of dew.
The curtain fell behind him. Then he stood
In twilight at the knees of Saul, whose mood
Was troubled. Next he knelt; and laid the head,
Tawny with tangled hair, with death-drops red,
Prone 'neath the monarch's stool; then raised his eyes.
Like stars forth-leaning from the western skies
That still hold daylight, wonderful and dim,
They caught the souls of those that gazed at him.
Saul loved him: but in Jonathan was stirred
More love than Saul's soul held: yet not one word
As yet was spoken. Then the monarch cried,
'Whose son art thou, thou young man?' He replied,
'I am thy servant Jesse's son, who dwell
At Bethlehem.'—As some still mountain well

Is silvered on its surface by the slow
Arising of the full moon orbed and low,
From star-set peaks impendent; so the tone
Of that melodious voice, thrilling alone
Through the tent's stillness, changed the yearning deep
Within the breast of Jonathan, and sleep
Fell from his soul. A man by love new-made,
His every hope upon the heart was laid
Of Jesse's son. Then, as he bent and burned,
The eyes of David on his eyes were turned;
And in that moment their twin lives became
The single splendour of one spiry flame,
Shooting from sundered brands to blend the might
Of married fires and leap aloft with light.

Yet Saul knew nought thereof: for eye to eye
Spake thunder-strong in silence; and the cry
Of spirit unto spirit left no trace
Upon the God-illumined gazing face
Of David; nor could Saul behold how wan
With lustre of new life was Jonathan:
For Saul sat buried in a dream of fear,
Spurning the giant's head, and clutched his spear;
Feeling by throes prophetic that some doom
His soul discerned not, through the gathering gloom,
On God's will waited; that strong love to hate
Would turn, he knew not how, by bitter fate.

Therefore, while thus he brooded, and thick sighs
Shook his vast frame, the mute o'ermastering eyes
Of Jonathan drew David. Forth they went
Together with firm footfall from the tent:

And lo! the sun was sunken, and the dews
Began to fall on slumberous avenues
Of plane, and palm, and pine—a mighty wood
Where gods might dwell in whispering solitude.
Thither with David, fleet of foot, and still,
Lest men should mar his purpose, from the hill
Unto the valley shadows went and ran,
Large in the lucent twilight, Jonathan.
There by an ancient holm-oak huge and tough,
Clasping the firm rock with gnarled roots and rough,
He stayed their steps; and in his arms of strength
Took David, and for sore love found at length
Solace in speech, and pressure, and the breath
Wherewith the mouth of yearning winnoweth
Hearts overcharged for utterance. In that kiss
Soul unto soul was knit and bliss to bliss.
Then, for the prince found bare embracement scant
To stand for token of such covenant
As he would strike with David, from his waist
He plucked the girdle, and the robe unlaced
That fell around his loins; next the blade,
Hilted with ivory and gold, he laid
Upon the grass before him, and his bow.
These things he gave to Jesse's son, that so,
Wearing his raiment and his armour, he
Within his sight a second self might be.
Nor were words wanting; for he bowed his head
Even to the breast of Jesse's son, and said:

'Nay, take them, David! Darling art thou called,
Darling of all men, Darling of the Lord,
But most my Darling—mine—whose heart is thralled,
Whose soul is even as thy soul! Take this sword,
Wherewith I smote the Philistines, what time
Swarming they fled from Michmash, horde by horde,
To Ajalon. Take this my bow, the prime
Of yew-boughs, fashioned for an archer's hand:
This mantle and this belt, wherewith I climb
Saul's throne, or in the gate for judgment stand.
Take all; for all I have hath fallen to thee;
And I am thine. Lo, as a winter wand,
Flowerless and leafless on the almond tree,
Waiteth, till on a sudden spring doth wake
The wonder of her buds to ecstasy;
So doth my soul beneath thy beauty break
Her prison-bands of deadness! Yea, I lean
Forth to thy sweetness and thy strength to slake
With dews of life, with heaven-shed light serene,
The drought that still hath bound me. Till this eve
I lived not: now I live; now find how keen
Are those swift shafts wherewith the Lord doth cleave
The hearts of lovers.—I am not like thee,
Godlike in voice, in gesture; yet can weave
Kindness around thee, till the people see
Thou art their prince as I am—yea, till thou,
My better, take and wield this sovereignty,
While I beneath thy throne in homage bow.—
Scion of Jesse! Like an arrowy palm,

That nestles 'neath a sheltering cedar-bough
Until her time be come; then, strong and calm,
Shoots heaven-ward, shadowing with ascendant crest
The sombre roof that nursed her, dropping balm
Into the sable cedar's rugged breast;
Shalt thou o'er me and mine up-soar, God-sent,
With gifts prophetic and with fervour blest
Beyond such lot as ours.—I am content
To be thy second.—Let us stand together,
We twain against the world, indifferent
To fate and fortune.—In clear summer weather
Twin eagles I have seen sailing alone
The cloudless blue, twin roes upon the heather
Bounding:-the like are we—so strong of bone,
So fleet of foot, so firm of will, to raze
The heathen remnant from this land, and throne
Jehovah in his seat of steadfast praise.—
Oh, for the beauty of thy brows, my brother!
Oh, for thy keen unwavering royal gaze!
Dearer art thou than sister or than mother,
Than moonèd eyes of maidens: for should death
Take thee, where in the whole world dwells another
To wake my winter, and with spirit-breath
Stir the sealed fountains of my slumbering life?
Dear to my heart is she who tarrieth
Now at the tent-door for my feet, the wife
Whose breasts are built with beauty as a tower.
Dear is the damsel I have gained in strife,
And soothed and tended like a stricken flower,

Till she too loved me. But this Love, this wonder,
That leaps upon me with a warrior's power,
Whose eyes are lightnings, and whose voice is thunder,
Wherein the flesh is nought, the heart's life all,
Who rives the crystal walls of heaven asunder,
Who welds my soul to thine a willing thrall—
This Love, this Life, this Word of living God,
Lo, David, He is Lord! He bids us fall
Here in this place upon the hallowed sod,
To swear a sacrament and solemn vow.—
Stretch forth, I prithee stretch, thy shepherd's rod.
See: it is broken. This is mine: take thou
That part. Now neither time nor chance shall sever
The troth that we have plighted. Brow to brow,
Let us pace forth, to live, one soul, for ever.'

So from his heart spake Jonathan. The trees
Waved their still summits in the evening breeze,
And all around was holy. Then between
The leafy chasms of that cleft ravine
Came sound of dance and timbrels. Maidens sang;
And with their shrill replies the valleys rang:
'Saul hath his thousands slain!' So cried the choir.
'And David his ten thousands!' Like a fire,
The antiphonal triumph flooding flew
From lip to lip. But ever fainter grew
The cry for Saul; while David's name, more clear
O'er lute and viol, smote the listening ear.

Saul in his tent was stirred.—'What more remains
But that he take the kingdom for his pains?'—
And on the eyes of Jonathan there fell
Visions of love to hate more deep than hell
Turned in a breast rebellious, of pure love
Forced to fly forth, a weak and wandering dove,
O'er the wild waste of waters: for he knew
Saul's soul.—Thus homeward fared they through the dew.

LOVE AND DEATH.

LOVE AND DEATH.

A City of the Plague, suspense, aghast,
Through all her silent streets and temples dim
With dusky pyre-smoke, and with incense cast

In vain to soothe insensible teraphim:
Black-stoled processions along ways erewhile
Clamorous with Bacchic shout and marriage hymn:

With beaten breast, with ominous shriek, they pile
Corpse upon corpse; then bid the flickering fire,
Lurid on palace-porch and peristyle,

Wrap in one ravening sheet, ascending higher
Than Pallas brazen on the city's brow,
Mother and maid, wife, brother, son and sire.

Day after day they perished. Then, for now
The people were fordone with wasting woe,
Spake the deep-throated prophet: 'Vow for vow;

'Blood for shed blood; for blow malignant, blow!—
Think ye the gods forget? Think ye the stain
Of sacrilege and slaughter, long ago

'Spilt to insult the unappeasable fane
Of blood-born, blood-bedewed Eumenides,
Beareth not fruit and blossometh again?

'I tell you, for the crime of Megacles—
Your crime; since who hath purged you?—like a tree
Springs the dread vengeance of dim goddesses.

'Now therefore heed my message: let there be,
Ere morning light, two lives of men free-born
By voluntary choice and service free

'To death for saving of the city sworn:
Die must they; this the gods require; than this
No less shall pluck from Athens' heel the thorn

'That rankles and corrodes her comeliness.
Lo! I have spoken. Take ye now good care.
For like a dream or drop of dew your bliss

'Shall surely wither into wandering air,
Till men cry—Here was Athens! By yon stone
Note where her temples and her houses were!—

'Unless the debt, exacted now, and grown
Enormous by long lapse, at length be paid.'
Thus Epimenides. With muttered moan

The people heard, and bowed faint heads, and laid
Dust on rent raiment, with dull grief distraught.—
That eve two comrades in the leafy glade

Of cool Colonos, soothed to solemn thought
By songs the night-bird flung for very mirth,
As though no lurid air weighed fever-fraught

O'er the hushed city and the sickening earth,
Lay merged in visions of the doom to be.
Their sounding titles, their resplendent birth,

Their strength, their beauty, their young chivalry,
Shall these be told, or in the noontide blaze
Of their great deed be swallowed utterly?

Ah! wherefore from the limbo of dead days
Recall thy fame, Cratinus? Wherefore dare
To vex thy laurel-wreath with wordy praise,

Aristodemus?—Noble, valiant, fair,
Of equal youth and honour, for the pride
Of Hellas they arose, a stately pair.

Strong was the love between them, deep and wide
As heaven up-breaking through a thousand spheres:
Seven-fold had it been proved and purified

By yearnings, and by achings, and by tears,
By pangs wherefrom the effeminate heart recoils,
And steadfast fellow-service through long years.

Now finely tempered, free from taint that foils
The soul athirst for luminous emprize,
This love, elate, arrayed in radiant spoils,

Shone like a beacon-light from ardent eyes.—
'O true and tried!'—(So speech belike arose
Between them, as strong winds in summer rise

With surge Æolian from the rapt repose
Of midnight, to sweep silent lands and fail,
Crying, Dawn comes, the golden gates unclose,

Before the Bridegroom's feet of fire we sail!)—
'O true as beaten brass! O trebly tried
As adamantine plates of linkèd mail!

'Sleep'st thou? or ponderest what the prophet cried?
Wherefore should we then live? The athlete's crown;
The warrior's brow with bay-leaves glorified;

'Seats at the hearth-stone of our mother-town;
To round and ring the whole, an honoured tomb:
These hopes are ours.—Were it not well to drown

'These good things in one best? to pluck the bloom
Now perfect of young life and love, that ne'er
Can fill her cup again of pure perfume,

'Or spread fresh petals to the nourishing air?
This flower, once gathered, will not fade: no rime
Shall nip the delicate leaves; no storm shall bare

'The anthered gold; no treacherous sap shall climb
The fragile tubes, with husk of hardening fruit
To choke the fretwork of the fiery prime.

'Who knows—forgive me, Love!—what little root
Of bitterness might rise to mar our joy?
Dimmed eyes, chilled hearts, dry lips with languor mute,

'The years that wither, and the years that cloy,
These come to other lovers. Shall we stay
To watch blind chance and change our souls destroy?

'Did not Patroclus die, Achilles pay,
Though goddess-born, his life, a little price,
For love made sure, for fame that flouts decay?

'Why linger? Why turn back? Fix steadfast eyes
There on the goal of daring! Is it nought
That thus fulfilling a fair sacrifice,

'The peace of Athens by our blood be bought?
Nought that we shine for ever in pure gold
At Delphian altars? That our tale be taught,

'On songs from lips of mighty poets rolled,
To lovers and to longing youths afire
With sorrow that our sacred dust is cold?

'Oh! with what fervent hearts, what proud desire,
Shall those young souls yearn after us! what lays,
Year after year, the laurel-wreathèd choir,

'Circling our shrine with hymns and holy praise,
Shall waft to isles Elysian, where we lie
Mid lilies and imperishable bays!'—

In such rapt communing and converse high
Methinks those comrades lingered, sphere by sphere
Ascending the celestial galaxy

Of burning thoughts. As some rash pioneer,
Skirting an inaccessible precipice,
Grade over grade, beholds at length the sheer

Waste of wide heaven unfold, a wilderness
Of air and light spanning the supine world:
Thus they, on wings out-soaring the abyss

Of hopes and cares and joys diurnal, hurled
Their souls forth at a venture, sprang like light
Into the fear-defying vortex whirled

Round heaven's ascendent spirals infinite.
Growing enamoured of the thought of Death,
They cried—'Hail Death! Brother of nourishing Night!

'May fails; the might of summer minisheth;
And mortal love endures a little space!
Nay, even now we draw a dying breath;

'Our life is one swift flight to thine embrace!
But thy perennial foison shall not fade;
No wrinkles shall corrode thy tranquil face;

'Nor shall thy blissful slumber be o'erlaid
With such vain dreams as trouble human sleep.
Comrade of Love, whose strength by thee is made

'More lasting than the adamantine steep
Of walls Olympian! unto thee we turn;
Into thine ageless hands, to guard and keep,

'We yield these souls unterrified, that burn
For draughts of cooling from thy sacred lake!
Thirst deep as ours disdains life's shallow urn,

'While from thy well gods yearn in vain to slake
The lingering fever of immortal hours!'—
Morn now began to whiten in the wake

Of Phosphor: far athwart dim olive-bowers
Freshened the breeze of dawning: so they rose.—
As one with toil forspent, with waning powers,

Forth from the stifling city-tumult goes
In summer to fresh fields and hills serene,
For sure rejuvenescence and repose;

So toward the Alps and upland breezes keen,
The snows untroubled and the silver rills,
That Death doth hide from Life in his demesne,

Those brethren o'er the dew-regenerate hills
Went smiling.—Arm in stalwart arm enlaced,
Alike resplendent, and with wedded wills,

They seemed twin gods, fraternal stars embraced,
Stout heroes from red slaughter homeward bound
Of ravening monsters in a dismal waste.

Their tawny curls by summer noons embrowned,
Their limbs athletic, their broad breasts of brass,
With aureoles of the smiting sun were crowned.

So, brushing diamonds from the glimmering grass,
Forth from the fields they paced, and toward the shrine
Of Pallas on the city-brow did pass.

There laid they down their lives. There Death divine
Made their Love perfect in the piety
They bore their mother—bride of the ocean brine,

Athens, the morning star of liberty!
Would that my song could utter how the hymn
Swelled in their dying ears victoriously!

How o'er their swooning eyes with death-mists dim
Swam the wild vision of the wistful crowd,
Submiss, suspense, straining each quivering limb

To greet with lips aflame and blessings loud,
With sobs and tears and sighs and out-stretched hands,
Their saints, in death gods evident avowed!

Enough! In ancient days and other lands
Love wrought this miracle, that men should die
Daunted by no soul-shattering commands

Of tyrannous princes, by no promise high
Of palms and seats celestial lured to fling
Life like a load away without a sigh:

But in the prime of manhood, in the spring
Of passionate expectation, these were bold
Wide-eyed across the fathomless gulf to wing

Of blank surmise and outer darkness cold.
Sustained and steadied for their dread emprize
By the mere might of Love, whose plumes of gold

Moved dove-like on Death's waters, in Love's eyes
Sounding unfathomable depths, they grew
Strong to explore untried immensities,
And seek in Death a Lover leal and true.

ANTIPHONAL CHORUS SUNG AT THE SLAYING OF CRATINUS AND ARISTODEMUS.

THE MAIDENS.

Io Pæan! weep no more:
  Death is disinherited.
Now like swans the lovers soar;
  See them leave their bloody bed!
Now they light upon the shore
  Where undying flowers are shed!
Yea, though Love by Fate be bound,
Lo, the victim victor crowned!

THE MEN.

Hail to thee, whose blighting breath
  All their mortal hath undone:
Hail to thee, whose pinions sheath
  Faulchions of the common sun:

Hail, all hail, deliverer Death!
  Father, friend, and foe in one!
Though in Life our Love be free,
Yet is Life but slavery!

THE OLD MEN.

Slavery to sense and slumber,
  Tears and wailings in the birth,
Ills that all the stars outnumber,
  Wants that crawl upon the earth,
Souls whom clogs of flesh encumber,
  Sorrows that usurp on mirth:—
From all these thou set'st us free,
Gracious Death! Thrice praise to thee!

THE YOUNG MEN.

Praise not Death, but Love and Life!
  'Twas their Love that made them brave,
Love that braced them for the strife,
  Love that raised them strong to save,
Nerved them for the bloody knife,
  Drew them fearless to the grave;
Love in Life supremely blest;
Life in Love, the last and best!

THE BOYS.

All their youth they flung aside;
  All their spring-time was deflowered;
Withered is their beauty's pride,
  And their manhood overpowered:

'Twas not Death for whom they died,
  Not the tomb to which they cowered—
But to prove their Love by flame,
But to purge their Life of shame.

THE MULTITUDE.

Athens, Mother of us all!
  'Twas for thee they dared to die;
And from this their funeral
  Dates our new-found liberty.
Land of freemen! At thy call
  Up they rose, and smilingly
Gave what Love and Life could give,
Scorning in thy Death to live!

LYRICS OF LIFE.

TEMA CON VARIAZIONI.

WITH A PRELUDE AND A FINALE.

PRELUDE.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

Hard task it were to tell how dewy-still
  Were flowers and ferns and foliage in the rays
Of Hesper, white amid the daffodil
  Of twilight flecked with faintest chrysoprase;
  And all the while, embowered in leafy bays,
The bird prolonged her sharp soul-thrilling tone.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

But as I stood and listened, on the air
  Arose another voice more clear and keen,
That startled silence with a sweet despair,
  And stilled the bird beneath her leafy screen:
  The star of Love, those lattice-boughs between,
Grew large and leaned to listen from his zone.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

The voice, methought, was neither man's nor boy's,
Nor bird's, nor woman's, but all these in one:
In Paradise perchance such perfect noise
Resounds from angel choirs in unison,
Chanting with cherubim their antiphon
To Christ and Mary on the sapphire throne.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

Then down the forest aisles there came a boy,
Unearthly pale, with passion in his eyes;
Who sang a song whereof the sound was joy,
But all the burden was of love that dies
And death that lives—a song of sobs and sighs,
A wild swan's note of Death and Love in one.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

Love burned within his luminous eyes, and Death
Had made his fluting voice so keen and high;
The wild wood trembled as he passed beneath,
With throbbing throat singing, Love-led, to die:
Then all was hushed, till in the thicket nigh
The bird resumed her sharp soul-thrilling tone.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

But in my heart and in my brain the cry,
The wail, the dirge, the dirge of Death and Love,
Still throbs and throbs, flute-like, and will not die,
Piercing and clear the night-bird's tune above,—
The aching, anguished, wild-swan's note, whereof
The sweet sad flower of song was over-blown.

I went a roaming through the woods alone,
And heard the nightingale that made her moan.

TEMA.

Love came, and in his hand
He bore a wilding wreath
Of blood-red flowers, the breath
Of summer breezes fanned.

Death came, and on the sod
He set a lily white,
A lily pale as night,
Before the laughing god.

Love's red, red roses fell;
They had nor root nor fruit:
With leaf and lusty shoct
Death's lily flourished well.

Love wept, but Death was true:
When all Love's flowers were shed,
He wreathed around Love's head
Death's lily wet with dew.

VARIATIONS.

I

A flower of Love—a briar
To bind the brows of youth,
Whose thorns are each a tooth
Of unassuaged Desire:

A wilding flower—a band
Of blossoms when the June
Was still in summer's noon,
And Love stood near at hand:

A wilding flower,—a wreath
Of crimson leaves that flame,
When Love is lost in shame,
And winter welcomes Death.

II

Ah little flower of Love!
Cropped flower whose stem hath bled,
On whom no dews are shed,
No rains from heaven above!

But only bitter Love
Hath plucked thee for a day,
To make his tresses gay,
His burning brows above:

And only weeping Love
Hath pressed thee to his heart,
Hath felt thy thorn's quick smart,
His bleeding breast above!

III

Ah little flower of Love,
Poor rootless, fruitless flower,
That witherest in an hour,
Yet art so full of love!

We hold thee to the light;
We see thee droop and fail:
Thy hues of dawn are pale;
Thy scent hath vanished quite.

Thou wast a rose of Love,
Sad flower, few years ago;
Thou art a rose of woe
To-day, a thorn of Love:—

A withered rose, a thorn:—
Of Love no joy remains;
But only aching pains,
Sad years and sorry scorn.

Poor thorny rose!—O Love,
Hadst thou no power with Death,
To make him end our breath,
Yet spare our flower of Love?

IV

Sealed are the doors of Death:
Then live and love; a day
Is ours, to weep or play,
Then pass the earth beneath.

Love on: for life is Love;
The end of Love is Death;
And though Love laugh at Death,
Yet Death shall conquer Love.

V

Pale perfect flower of Death,
Whose root and fruit are one,
Above the stars and sun,
The earth and seas beneath.

In thee the bud of Love,
That might have witherèd,
Hath raised her perfumed head
All chance or change above.

In thee, pale flower of Death,
Love's rose, a lily grown,
Shall ne'er be over-blown;
For who can wither Death?

Rose-lily, flower of Love
And Death, fade not, but bloom
Within the dateless tomb
Of Death that shelters Love!

FINALE.

From the sorrow and the care
To which mortal love is heir;
From the broken sleep and folly
Of a lover's melancholy;
From the thorn that near the rose
Waits to sting at pleasure's close;
From the lingering long remorse
When wild Love hath run his course;
He hath fled, and he hath found
Peace and slumber underground.
Lay him 'neath the quiet turf,
Far from ocean's plunging surf,
Far from winds that weep and wail
When the star of Love is pale,
Far from sound of hurrying feet
Up and down the cruel street:

Let his grave be roofed with yew,
Sun-proof, still, and dark of hue;
Where the blackbird and the thrush
Pipe in summer's morning hush;
Where the snow spreads smooth and soft
Over copse and over croft.
Leave him there, and let him lie;
Brush the tear-drops from your eye:
Not a voice of grief be heard,
Lest his blissful sleep be stirred.
What he longed for, he hath ta'en:
Would he live to love again?
Nay, be certain, he hath found
Rest from love in holy ground.
Which of us who round him bow,
But is envious of him now?

THE FALL OF A SOUL.

I sat unsphering Plato ere I slept:
  Then through my dream the choir of gods was borne,
  Swift as the wind and splendid as the morn,
Fronting the night of stars; behind them swept
Tempestuous darkness o'er a drear descent,
  Wherein I saw a crowd of charioteers
  Urging their giddy steeds with cries and cheers,
To join the choir that aye before them went:

But one there was who fell, with broken car
And horses swooning down the gulf of gloom;
Heaven-ward his eyes, though prescient of their doom,
Reflected glory like a falling star,
While with wild hair blown back and listless hands
Ruining he sank toward undiscovered lands.

LIFE'S CROWN.

To have written one song that shall live
On the lips of the fair and the free;
To have given what heroes can give
In the service of Saint Liberty;

To have spoken for once with the power
Of a prophet beloved of the Lord;
To have felt for one terrible hour
The pride of the conquering sword:—

All these things were well; but I vow,
I'd rather have stirred with my soul
Your soul for one minute, and now
Have been dying:—Such Love is Life's whole.

RENUNCIATION.

O friend, how is thy troth forsworn!
Thy very love is like a thorn:
With loveless love my breast is torn.

I fain would leave thee and forget;
I will not make my gift a debt
To charge thee with, and see thee fret.

Freely I gave, and thou wast free
To take or leave as pleasèd thee;
Love bargained not with thee or me.

But thou didst take, and smile, and say
'Free gift for gift I strive to pay,'
Plotting the while my soul to slay.

Go, let me live henceforth alone:
My vows that were so firm, are blown
By thy false breath like sand from stone.

FAREWELL.

It is buried and done with,
The love that we knew:
Those cobwebs we spun with,
Are beaded with dew.

I loved thee; I leave thee:
To love thee was pain:
I dare not believe thee,
To love thee again.

Like spectres unshriven
Are the years that I lost;
To thee they were given
Without count of cost.

I cannot revive them
By penance or prayer:
Hell's tempest must drive them
Through turbulent air.

Farewell, and forget me;
For I too am free
From the shame that beset me,
The sorrow of thee.

ὑποθήκη εἰς ἐμαυτόν.

Back to thy books! The swift hours spent in vain
Are flown and gone:
Thou hast no charm to lure them, or regain
What loss hath won.

Up from thy sleep! The dream of idle love,
So frail and fair,
Hath vanished, and its golden wings above
Melt in mid air.

Stand not, nor gaze astonied at the skies,
Serenely cold:
They have no answer for thine eager eyes;
Thy tale is told.

Fool, in all folly cradled, swathed from sense,
To trust a toy;
To purchase from pronounced indifference
A shallow joy;

To leave thy studious native heights untrod
For that low soil,
Where momentary blossoms deck the sod;
To pant and toil

In hungry chasings of the painted fly,
That fluttered past—
Back to thy summits, where what cannot die
Survives the blast!

There, throned in solitary calm, forget
Who wrung thy heart:
Long hours and days of silent years may yet
Restore a part

Of that large heritage and realm sublime,
Which, love-elate,
Thou fain would'st barter for the fields that time
Makes desolate.

L'ABBANDONATA.

We sat together on the bank;
No human thing was near:
The sun above us rose and sank,
The sky was sunny clear.

It was the middle month of May;
The thrushes sang for glee;
The flowers upon that holyday
Seemed made for him and me.

I would that I had died that day
With his head on my knee,
For year by year the merry May
Brings less of love to me.

LIGHT LOVE.

From the vows that were made to be broken
Our spirits are free:
Those words that so lightly were spoken,
Like foam of the sea,
Are scattered; we cannot recapture
The ring of their rapture.

Our laughter will soon become hollow:
Must languor and tears
On the path of past happiness follow?
Shall desolate years
Replace with a lingering December
The May we remember?

Nay, sweet heart; ere pleasure hath perished,
We'll kiss and we'll part:
The blossom of love that we cherished,
Hath gladdened our heart;
'Twere wiser to pluck it this minute,
While scent is yet in it.

MARI MAGNO.

I met Love on the waters, and I said:
'Lord, tell thy servant if the fault be mine
Or his alone, that we who once were thine,
Now daily further from thy face are led!'
'I blame you both:' Love answered: 'You who read
The book of self-deception line by line,
Loving yourself, and fearing not to twine
Poisonous passion-flowers around his head:
Him too I blame because he was too weak
To shun your evil and to choose your good,
Too soft to serve you in the hour of need.
Thus then I pass the sentence which you seek:
Love's higher law you still misunderstood;
And love, for him, was but a wayside weed.'

ALONE.

Where art thou, friend?—Day after day,
Youth like a river flows away;
And forth we fare to meet decay:—
Where art thou?

Where art thou, friend?—Beneath the sun
Man hath one life, but only one;
And Life to Death doth hourly run:—
Where art thou?

Where art thou, friend?—Must our own will
Combine with chance and change to chill
The hearts that once were wont to thrill?—
Where art thou?

Where art thou, friend?—Stretch forth thine hand
Across the waste to where I stand;
Let love not fade like fires unfanned:—
Where art thou?

Where art thou, friend?—Can love secure
In gloom and solitude endure?
Oblivion's wound what skill can cure?—
Where art thou?

Where art thou, friend?—In vain I wail.
Let me not spread my spirit's sail
Alone, to drift before the gale!—
Where art thou?

ANTICYRA.

Dear wounded Love, that know'st not where
To lay aside life's load of care!
Poor Love, that canst not find a home,
Tear-tired with wandering o'er the foam
Of tempest-stricken wishes!—Ah,
Take flight unto Anticyra!

There shalt thou seek on that low shore
Green tufts of healing hellebore,
Whose drowsy scent shall soothe thy brain
Racked with the long delirious strain
Of dreams too fair for mortals.—Ah,
Take flight unto Anticyra !

This islet is not far to find :
On the blue billows of the mind
It rests, where tranquil thoughts and all
That make life pure and musical,
Bloom ever-green and cooling.—Ah,
Take flight unto Anticyra !

FROM THE GULISTÂN.

In bygone years this passed, which I remember.
It was the month of July : Summer's heat
Parched lips and palate ; and the empoisoned wind
Burned in my bones their marrow. Then because
Through utter feebleness the blaze of noonday
Consumed me, in the shadow of a wall
I sheltered, seeking some one who might help
To cool within my veins the fervid fever,
And with a drop of water quench my fire.
Suddenly, from the darkness of a doorway
Shone on my sight a Sun—I mean a Beauty,

Such as the tongue of eloquence were powerless
To paint her splendour. Thus through dreary midnight
Goes forth the dawn, or from its caverned blackness
Gushes the fountain of immortal Life.
She in her hand stretched forth a cup of water,
With snow-flakes cool, with sugar sweet, with roses
Scented :—I know not whether she with rose
Had made that water fragrant, or had dropped
Dews from the roses of her cheeks therein.
I took the cup of cooling from her hands,
Most gracious hands, and drank, and new life filled me.

The thirst that in the heart doth burn,
  No purest draught assuageth :
Yea, though I drink whole seas, I yearn,
  And still my fever rageth.

Happy the man upon whose eyes
  Each morn that beauty shineth !
His sun shall never leave the skies,
  His summer ne'er declineth.

Whoso with wine is drunk, will wake
  When matin song is chaunted :
But who from Beauty's fount doth slake
His thirst, may never hope to wake
  Till doomsday disenchanted.

IN QUESTA SELVA SELVAGGIA.

I

Fair sights and sounds assail me. I am torn
  By the quick pulses of the passionate sky,
  Throbbing with light of stars, or stormfully
  Piling pearled thunder-clouds athwart the morn.
The strange sweet glance, the smile of passers borne
  From hearts that know me not through lip and eye,
  Thrill me with fruitless longing—I would die
  To feel their life, and be less love-forlorn.
The world is thus a quiver, stored with sharp
  Fledged shafts of inexpressible pleasure-pain,
  Searching the marrow of the wakeful brain;
While memory, like a tense Æolian harp,
  Sensitive to the breath of dreams that sweep
  Its tingling chords, torments the soul in sleep.

II

Gustans gustavi mellis paullulum,
Et ecce morior!—A little honey
I tasted, pure as palest agrimony,
And lo, the death-pangs on my soul are come!—
Was this my sin? Amid the tangled trees
Where He hath set our going, drops the comb
From many a pendent bough, the wild bee's home:
May we not take thereof a little ease?
God hangs that harmless venom in our sight;
But man's vow makes it mortal, or man's will
Bent upon lawlessness and lewd delight.
Could we but extirpate each thought of ill,
Could we but strip our soul of self, we might
Aye taste God's honey on His holy hill.

III

'Tis self whereby we suffer; 'tis the greed
To grasp, the hunger to assimilate
All that earth holds of fair and delicate,
The lust to blend with beauteous lives, to feed
And take our fill of loveliness, which breed
This anguish of the soul intemperate:
'Tis self that turns to pain and poisonous hate
The calm clear life of love that angels lead.
Oh, that 'twere possible this self to burn
In the pure flames of joy contemplative!
Then might we love all loveliness, nor yearn
With tyrannous longings; undisturbed might live,
Greeting the summer's and the spring's return,
Nor wailing that their bloom is fugitive!

κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων.

Give freely to the friend thou hast;
Unto thyself thou givest:
On barren soil thou canst not cast,
For by his life thou livest.

Nay, this alone doth trouble me—
That I should still be giving
Through him unto myself, when he
Is love within me living.

I fain would give to him alone,
Nor let him guess the giver;
Like dews that drop on hills unknown,
To feed a lordly river.

A MYSTERY.

The love wherewith my heart is big for thee,
Hath found no home with cowards or with slaves;
It blooms a deathless flower among the free,
And on untrodden heights unbroken waves.

No little heart can hold it, for it springs
  Twinned with eternity and scorn of death,
Feeding on hopes and high imaginings
  That fail not with our fitful human breath.

With those sweet strivings of the blood that stir
  Our souls in youth, and make our manhood great,
By interchange of love and life with her
  Who clings to us in bonds of equal fate,

This passion hath no part—nor on the roots
  Of sense and yearning stationed, nor upborne
By tenderness ; nor are its sterner fruits
  Shown in dear kisses given at night or morn.

Be it enough that thou and I are one,
  That years and days seem nothing in the shine
Of that perpetual and unsinking sun
  Which nerves our souls with energy divine.

If tongue might tell the mystery I mean,
  Then all the world would love perchance like us :
But should these lines by the great world be seen,
  They'd move mere laughter. Well : 'tis better thus

IL FIOR DEGLI EROICI FURORI.

Saxifraga Pyramidalis.

I bloom but once, and then I perish ;
This plume of snow
No sun or soft south wind will cherish—
'Tis drooping now.

Black streams beneath me foam and thunder ;
Their icy breath,
There where the rocks are rent asunder,
Woos me with death.

Still like a fair imperial streamer
I float and flaunt ;
I am no light luxurious dreamer,
Whom dangers daunt.

For me no delicate life-lover
Will dare to bow ;
My pyramid of bloom shall cover
No craven's brow.

But should some youth on whom the splendour
Of hope is high,
Who loves with love superb and tender
What cannot die,

Pass by this dark and awful dwelling,
He shall not shrink
From slippery rock or sick waves swelling
To the black brink ;

But stoop and pluck the song I utter
Of death and joy :
Yea, my free plume of snow shall flutter
To greet the boy.

DESPAIR.

Came the spring, and every flower was blowing ;
But I lay
Like an ember that is feebly glowing,
Faint and grey.

Summer came, and mowers in the meadow
Laughed and sung ;
But my misery, like a sable shadow,
Closer clung.

Came blithe autumn, and the stranger swallows
Southward flew ;
But I only cried—black winter follows,
Wreathed with yew.

Winter came, and now the earth is sleeping
Like a child ;
But mine eyes are wide with ever weeping,
My brain wild.

Yea, I listen on my lonely pillow ;
Hear the wind ;
Hear upon the beach the restless billow
Churn and grind.

Yea, all day the unfamiliar voices
That I loathe,
Shred and card my sense with hideous noises,
Till I clothe

Weary nerve and waking eye with slumber,
Poppy-deep :—
Hateful dreams and memories encumber
That dull sleep.

Oh, I would that I were closely shrouded,
Deaf and dead,
Coffined in the grave and over-clouded
With cold lead !

Oh, to yield my first-fruits of affection
To the tomb ;
Where no thoughts of any resurrection
Should presume,

Through the loveless, long, illimitable
Years of rest,
To invade the steady peace and stable
Of my breast !

But the dust should slowly fall and moulder ;
Grave-clothes rot ;
Time, that can the clasp of lead unsolder,
Stir me not.

Now it seems that, as I think upon it,
I am dead ;
Soft my grave with heavy snow-drifts on it,
Like a bed.

AFTER TEMPEST.

The dews of the evening are scattered,
And the woods weep ;
The banners of thunder hang tattered
Over the deep :
Now that the storms are gone,
Why are the heavens wan,
Waiting for sleep ?

Tear-drops of sorrow are falling
From tired eyes :
The depths of the spirit are calling,
Sighs unto sighs :
Yearning is spent,
Passion hath rent
The veil that she lent
To hide the calm skies.

The sweet stars are lying
Bare to the night ;
But one heart is dying
After the fight.
Is there hope, little star,
So faint and so far,
Is there yet any light ?

Down in the valley, oh, listen !
Lute-strings are loud :
And lo, where the moon-beams glisten
From the dark cloud !
Soul full of sorrow,
Shadows will fly :
Wait for no morrow ;
Singing is nigh.

FORTUNATE ISLES.

There are islands, there are islands
On the ocean's heaving breast,
Where the honey-scented silence
Broods above the halcyon's nest ;

Where the sands are smooth and golden,
And the flowers bloom, one by one,
Unbeloved and unbeholden
Save by the all-seeing sun.

I shall ne'er with friend or lover
Wander on from glade to glade
Through those forests, or discover
Silvery fountains in the shade :

But another's foot shall linger
  Mid the bowers whereof I dream,
And perchance a careless finger
  Strew the roses on the stream ;

Happier men shall pluck the laurel
  For the tresses that they love,
And the passionate pale coral
  Wreathe round brows I know not of.

BEFORE THE DAWN.

As one who stands before a picture set
  In ebon framework, so in dreams of night
  I gazed upon broad mountains, billowy bright
  With rays ineffable—a window let
Into the wall of blackness; and while yet
  My spirit pondered, on my dreaming sight
  This legend flashed in letters fiery white:
  THESE BE THE HILLS OF HEAVEN. FORGO. FORGET.
Then came who called me, and I rose, and went
  Along the moonlit city walls, where roll
  The springs of Tiber; and through copse and dell
Fared in the light malign: but wonderment
  Of that strange dream possessed me, and my soul
  Yearned for the Hills of Heaven like one in hell.

AN INVOCATION.

To God, the everlasting, who abides,
One Life within things infinite that die:
To Him whose unity no thought divides:
Whose breath is breathèd through immensity.

Him neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard;
Nor reason, seated in the souls of men,
Though pondering oft on the mysterious word,
Hath e'er revealed his Being to mortal ken.

Earth changes, and the starry wheels roll round;
The seasons come and go, moons wax and wane;
The nations rise and fall, and fill the ground,
Storing the sure results of joy and pain:

Slow knowledge widens toward a perfect whole,
From that first man who named the name of heaven,
To him who weighs the planets as they roll,
And knows what laws to every life are given.

Yet He appears not. Round the extreme sphere
Of science still thin ether floats unseen:
Darkness still wraps Him round; and ignorant fear
Remains of what we are, and what have been.

Only we feel Him; and in aching dreams,
Swift intuitions, pangs of keen delight,
The sudden vision of His glory seems
To sear our souls, dividing the dull night:

And we yearn toward Him. Beauty, Goodness, Truth;
These three are one; one life, one thought, one being;
One source of still rejuvenescent youth;
One light for endless and unclouded seeing.

Mere symbols we perceive—the dying beauty,
The partial truth that few can comprehend,
The vacillating faith, the painful duty,
The virtue labouring to a dubious end.

O God, unknown, invisible, secure,
Whose being by dim resemblances we guess,
Who in man's fear and love abidest sure,
Whose power we feel in darkness and confess!

Without Thee nothing is, and Thou art nought
When on Thy substance we gaze curiously:
By Thee impalpable, named Force and Thought,
The solid world still ceases not to be.

Lead Thou me God, Law, Reason, Duty, Life!
All names for Thee alike are vain and hollow—
Lead me, for I will follow without strife;
Or, if I strive, still must I blindly follow.

A MEXICAN TALE.

PROLOGUE.

O friend fire-hearted! Not for us alone
Are fair things holy; nor are we the first
To weep o'er youth's frail blossom overblown.

Love with the rosy spirit-wings was nursed
On Night's broad breast in chaos; there his smile
Like sunrise over weltering billows burst:

Whereby a world was fashioned. Death the while
Herself from Sleep divided, side by side
To walk thenceforth with Love Life's echoing aisle.

Wherefore we mortal men are hungry-eyed,
Watching the waste of beauty, how it dies
Hour after hour, and droops to Lethe's tide.

Heard you the song softer than lovers' sighs?
'Alas that Spring should vanish with the rose!'
'Tis the high-piping voice of Omar cries:—

'That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah! whence and whither flown again, who knows?'

Who knows? Who knows? Like the funereal clang
Of ghastly brazen belfries out of tune,
From age to age the cruel question rang,

Which none hath answered. Therefore, flowers in June
Touch our charmed sense to sadness, and the cheek
Of youth is sacred as a waning moon.

Go to the river-bed of Tempe; seek
Some forlorn cup of hyacinth, or tress
Of wild anemone the breezes break:

These are the poems of the drear distress
That weighs on all things beauteous. In the prime
Of this old world, now worn and lustreless,

Men taught by signs like these that frosty rime
Nips the rathe buds of earth, that beauty-bloom
Dwells on the lips we love a little time.

Yea, all the ancient stories tell of doom:
Even Balder, the most beautiful among
The brave of Asgard, hid his head in gloom;

Each spring the maids of Tyre and Sidon sung
Their dirge for Thammuz: nay, the Son of God
Who bent his brows on Calvary, was young.

One thought, fire-footed with a curse, hath trod
The hearts of countless nations. All and each,
Singing Ah Linus! sank beneath the sod.

Far, far away in lands where lianes pleach
Their bloomy fretwork over flaming skies,
Men dared in bygone centuries to teach

By no mere myth the doom of youth that dies;
There truth found tragic utterance; far too small
For that fierce people were a poet's sighs:

Wherefore in living pomp majestical
Yearly they showed the dreadful pageant forth;
Year after year one death admonished all.

It is a tale that thrills our frigid north
With terror. Listen! The blood-clarions call.

PALUMBA.

'Tis sunrise o'er the City of the Sun,
City of many waters. Air and earth
Throb with the dawn-god's advent. One by one,

The stars have faded in his mighty mirth:
And now the fierce fire-summits coned with snow,
Flash back their signal to the new day's birth.

The lake, beneath, mirrors that crimson glow,
Shimmering like molten gold in liquid sheen;
While all the dark-stoled forests, row by row

Arising from the margent, turn their green
To glory—sombre oak, and sycamore
Aërial, throned above the black ravine.

High rush the rays: the tides of morning pour
Full-flooding radiance over lawn and lea:
Mountain and lake and long low-curving shore

Commingle in the dawn's immensity:
Lo, how their outlines welter in the swirl
Of living lustre like an opal sea!

Mists from the silvery marish soar and curl
Round columned cliffs basaltic; earth and sky
Seem but one hollowed sphere of orient pearl.

On yonder raft, with dazed half-dreaming eye,
A young man fair as morning toward the town
Star-turreted in light, looks earnestly.

Upon his hair is set a lilied crown
Of lotus pink and azure, wet with dew
From sleepy-petalled clusters dropping down.

About his feet shine flowers of every hue
The lush lake-gardens nourish; fruits up-piled
Mid sombre sprays of juniper and yew.

Even thus methinks journeyed young Bacchus, isled
On halcyon mirrors of far Indian seas,
Under the waftage of winds love-beguiled.

He with his floating garden from the trees
That fringe the shore, puts forth upon the tide,
Soothing the while deep pain with melodies.

The tall reeds wave, the ripples at his side
Whisper, the heaving currents swell with light :
Far mountains, blue as crystal, in their pride

Dilate, and all their flaming summits white
Flash with the panoply of Seraphim.
Stirred by his song, with slow deliberate flight

From sunshine into shadow richly dim,
The sumptuous flamingoes wing their way :
The whole world seems to bend and circle him.

He was the brightest flower that bloomed that day
On nature's bosom. Yet he knew it not.
For mid the sweetness of the morning lay

Deep in his dreaming soul one sombre thought :
The fervid life within, the angel-eyed
Beauty that orbed his youth, were sorrow-fraught.

Three nights ago his friend and comrade, tried
Through years of fellow-service and of joy,
Home from the field had come and drooped and died.

Over his bed the mute awe-stricken boy
Bending through long night-vigils dank with dew,
Had watched death's imperceptible touch destroy

The palace of the sweetest soul he knew :
Till when at last day's triumph filled the sky,
The lips he loved were icy-cold and blue.

Therefore earth lost her lustre, and his eye,
Seeking in vain a vanished form, could find
No joy in things that, like his love, must die :

But brooding on the still deeps of the mind,
That take and give again transfigured dreams,
His disenchanted spirit hourly pined ;

Till yesternight above sleep's leaden streams
The image of his comrade, very frail,
Rose with an aureole of moony beams

About his mist-white forehead ; and a tale,
Whereof the burden was too strange to tell,
Flowed from those lips so sorrowful and pale.

Then ere he woke, like some deep-throated bell
Sounding through summer twilight faint and far,
An echo of that mystic message fell

Upon his soul : 'Oh listen ! Star by star,
Heaven dwindles ; her long cycles wax and wane :
For ever Love and Death wage equal war.

'The snows on yonder hills dissolve in rain :
Foaming and fretting the streams forward fare,
To merge their sweetness in the barren main ;

'None may delay upon the Alpine stair,
Or eddy round the rose-tree without end,
Or bask amid the low lake-mirrors fair.

'We too toward death and utter darkness wend :
Lo, I who loved thee, now am nought but clay ;
Thou canst not clasp my neck or call me friend !

'Yet from the weeds outworn of our decay
Is woven the incorruptible : death's womb
Shall be the cradle of the dawn of day.'

The echo died upon the darkened room :
The vision faded, and the boy in vain
Stretched empty arms of yearning through the gloom.

What time grey dawn went forth across the plain,
Sighing he rose, to gather fruit, to load
His raft with summer wreaths and golden grain.

But in his heart the while that dream abode ;
And much he pondered of youth's fading flower,
And of sure Death that ever faster strode ;

Till now the clash of cymbals told the hour
When men through Anahuac offered prayer
Unto the great World-Spirit's awful power.

Palumba prayed : 'Thou Life of earth and air,
Father of flowers and souls, immortal Youth,
By whom we live and breathe and move and are.

'Hast thou for all thy children then no ruth?
Or weepest thou, as we must weep, to see
The bloom of fair things fade? Is this the truth,

'That thou art tired with tears? It cannot be.
For thine eternal cycles do not shrink ;
The life that lives to die, doth gladden thee.

'Inarmed with Death, thou on the crystal brink
Of the world's ocean walkest like a friend ;
While in the weltering waves we strive and sink.

'O mystery of life that hath no end,
Conjoined with death undying! Doom that weighs
On the vext soul, which none can comprehend!'

He bent his head in worship, and the rays
Of sunrise crowned him with pure gold, as when
Wreaths on a victim's hair the pale priest lays.

Over the lake he passed, and watchful men
Beheld him gliding like a blissful god :
For in that hour he seemed the denizen

Of paradisal bowers where angels trod.
Unto the mart amid the gleaming quays
At last he came, and with an aloe rod

Close moored his raft, spreading the chalices
Of perfumed flowers to tempt each curious eye.
Then down the ringing causeway on the breeze

A sound was borne of feet tumultuously
Trampling the pavement ; and the boy arose,
Lap-full of flowers, to scan the passers-by.

As when at dawn an Alpine torrent flows,
Tossing fire-flakes of foam against the sun,
So chafed the crowd, crested with wreaths of rose

And gilded circlets and gay pennants spun
From plumes auroral. Proudly canopied
'Neath awnings with barbaric jewels dun,

Swayed potentates and princes solemn-eyed,
Upborne by swarthy slaves. The fervid hum
Of voices booming like a billowy tide,

Mingled with frantic fife and hollow drum.
Along the line ran priests, from censers flinging
Thick fumes of copal and of galbanum.

The unctuous stream of new-shed gore was clinging
To clotted curls, more sleek than down the crow
Preens 'neath a gibbet; and the air was ringing

With shouts of carnage: for a people's vow
This morn had been absolved; the altar-grave
With sacrificial blood was reeking now.

On comes the crowd, which like a rolling wave
Stays not, but gathers volume as it goes;
And now they reach the quays where sunbeams lave

The boy knee-deep in scented drifts of rose:
They stop, they waver. Then a voice more keen
Than shriek of clarions when the foemen close,

Shrills o'er the tumult: 'People! I have seen
The god we seek!' 'Twas the high priest, who thus,
With gory knife in hand outstretched obscene,

Marked the fair youth. He pale and tremulous
Shrank from the ardent arms that clasped him round:
For in that moment the innumerous

Multitude triumphed: 'Lo, the god is found!
God for a year! Then victim glorious!
Then saint with deathless saints for ever crowned!'

He in his heart faltered: for who can rouse
Courage to greet death when the day is told?
Then summoning great strength, he cleared his brows:

Full well he knew that not with love or gold
His life might now be ransomed; yea, he thought,
'This was the doom then that my dream foretold!

High on the shoulders of ten thousand caught,
With roses and with lilies in his clasp,
Adown the quays they bore him. Frenzy-fraught

The people surged around, leaping to grasp
His mantle's hem in fierce idolatry.
With thrilling shriek, and short thick-throated gasp,

Mothers along the path on bended knee
Prayed that the gods might give them sons like this!
So came they to the shrines that all men see

Soaring o'er Tenochtitlan. Terraces
And pyramids ascend with frieze and fret,
Blazing on gold-embroidered galleries:

While by the lake, with pale and parapet
Fenced from the gleaming water, gardens bloom
Mid cedared silences and orchards set

With glimmering apples in an emerald gloom.
But wheresoe'er throughout this Eden stray
The perfumed paths, they lead but to the tomb:

For on those pyramids by night and day
Pyres smoke to giant idols; here the breeze
Sickens with scent of blood; the foul decay

Of carrion mingles with magnolia trees;
Bald-headed vultures 'neath the cypress-shade
With innocent song-birds squat in bloated ease.

Threading dim court and sculptured colonnade
Cooled with fair fountains, the wild revel came
Unto the mound with marble overlaid,

Where burns the fierce World-Spirit's altar-flame.
Gigantic jaws of serpents guard the flight
Of steps that wind around the massy frame;

And on the summit in perpetual light
Towers the wide-eyed implacable god serene.
Before him glares a silver shield, the bright

Symbol of all his awful eyes have seen
In the world's rondure; and the glittering floor
Mingles with bronze fresh blood in tawny sheen.

Here stayed the multitude. The boy before
That dreadful image, from his lap let loose
The wealth of pure cool-chaliced flowers he bore:

They tumbling in a torrent, with the ooze
Of blood-clots stained their sweetness. From his waist
Meanwhile the linen girdle, and the shoes

From off his feet were taken. Snowy chaste,
Perfect, without one blot or flaw, he rose,
By the rich beams of morning light embraced.

Then were rare gems and garments odorous
Drawn from the inner shrine to wrap him round.
Wreaths of gay plumage flaunted on his brows;

With gleaming gold his neck and chest were crowned;
Till in the semblance of the god he stood
As in a dream upon the mystic mound.

Then was he ware how all the brotherhood
Of priests adored him kneeling, how to him
Incense ascended from the cedar-wood;

While piercing like a star through vapours dim,
One thought his soul divided :—For a year
To drink life's goblet from the bubbling brim

Down to the lees! For one delirious year
To play the god—then die—but dying win
Glory that puts to flight all mortal fear!

So now the boy, who erewhile plied his trade
In fruit and blossoms on the sleepy mere,
Becomes a god in silken sheen arrayed,

With diamond wreaths and uncut emeralds clear.
Whate'er his soul desireth, on his lap
Is showered in full profusion—for a year.

Have ye not seen from some high Alpine gap
Or gate of glacier, sun-gold pouring down
Pure amber torrents on the meadow-map

Disclosed beneath, with pine, and larch, and crown
Of flowers innumerous? The swift splendour passes;
But ever on its heel the mountain's frown

Touches with dismal night those laughing grasses:
In front the glory fades, while death and gloom
Push on with still descending shadowy masses.

Such and so fleeting are the joys which bloom
For poor Palumba, daily growing less
Before the chill shade of devouring doom.

Yet youth is jocund, and the wilderness
Of hours whereof each minute is a joy,
May well distract from dreams of wretchedness

The rapt imagination of a boy.
Those airy palaces of cedar wood
And marble builded, thronged with maidens coy,

With song-birds echoing, where the glassy flood,
This way and that circumfluous, mirrors towers,
Through grove and garden glittering many a rood,

O'erwhelm his brain with scent of summer flowers,
And sound of music, and strange sights half seen
Mid emerald mazes and enamelled bowers.

Morn, noon, and night, the joyous tambourine,
Shaken by maiden fingers rosy-fair,
Maddens the heart of dancers on the green;

And there are banquets on the grassy stair
Of heaven-ascending hillsides; noonday dreams,
Half sleep, half love-joy, in the harmless air;

Soul-soothing rambles beside silver streams;
Kisses and converse, sweet though fugitive,
With him or her beneath faint evening beams.

How many a careless youth might choose to live
Such life for one full year, nor weep the while
Anticipating aught that death could give?

What time perchance he wearied of the smile
Fixed on the face of all things, he would pass
Forth with companions from the gilded pile

Unto cleft cañons of Cordilleras.
Through woods where never foot of man before
Stirred the sere tangles of scythed pampas-grass,

From cedar unto palm, from sycamore
To sugar-cane, by many a wildering maze,
Downwards they wandered. There the torrents tore

Tracks through dim porphyry portals, and the rays
Of noon unlidded, piercing black abysses,
Disclosed aërial ferns and crimson blaze

Of blossoms on still boughs no rude wind kisses;
But only the cool breath of tumbling streams
Ruffles their feathery plumes and tangled tresses.

Here like the shapes of phantoms seen in dreams,
Wind stealthy serpents, immemorial snakes,
Upon whose scales the gold of ages gleams;

The boar comes shouldering through the jungly brakes;
The monkeys mop and gibber on the bough;
While echo to the parrot's scream awakes.

There oftentimes above some mossy brow,
He with his comrades suddenly would chance
On submerged cities—temples, row by row,

Buried beneath the uniform expanse
Of waveless forests,—pyramids and piles,
Where shadowy branches weave perpetual dance.

They through the unremembered palace aisles
Wandered, and marvelled at the work of men
Whose very names they knew not. 'Neath the smiles

Of gods once worshipped, lurks the lynx's den ;
The long resounding courts, the terraces,
Are tufted with wild sage and cyclamen.

Lianes scarce undulating to the breeze
Hang lamps of odorous blossom high o'erhead,
Starring the thick roof, whose interstices

Are here and there with light-irradiated
Glimpses of far-off heavenly azure paved—
So far, so dim, you scarcely could have said

Whether that fretwork were of gems engraved,
Or flowers, or sunshine; while the breaths that blew,
This way and that their shadowy curtains waved.

In such wild solitudes his spirit grew
One with the soul that, like a life of life,
Thrills the whole frame of nature through and through.

He feared not then the close and sickening strife,
The tightening of the heart-strings, or the cry
Of anguish cowering 'neath the cruel knife :

For mid these ruins frail humanity,
Released from brief delirium, seemed to sleep,
At peace once more with earth and air and sky ;

Nor was their concord death, but union deep
In life undying, vital interchange
Through winds that rustle and through rains that weep,
Herb, beast, and tree, and misty mountain range.

Sometimes when o'er his heart the dread of death
Swept like a frost through fields where friends carouse,
And pleasure flower-like shrank before that breath,

He would go forth unto the lazar-house,
If haply he might staunch his open wound
With the stern spectacle of human woes.

Roaming in such a mood, with soul untuned,
Through corridors where sin and suffering pined,
He spake to one who sat apart and moaned

In darkness: 'Wherefore, old man, art thou blind?'—
'I was not blind one year ago; but weeping
Hath dried mine eyes. Seeking in vain to find

'My vanished darling, long night-vigils keeping;
This made me blind. I had a son, sir, bright
As heaven, who perished.' The hot tears were leaping

Still from his withered eyeballs. Quick as light,
Palumba questioned: 'Is Death then so sad?
Wilt thou not find him mid the infinite

'Blossoms that make the deathless garden glad?'—
'Nay, not so. Had he been less perfect, I
Might here have seen him, in strange garment clad

'Of clay I knew not—might unwittingly
Have kissed or cursed his spirit in the dress
Of slave or serpent. But 'tis vanity

'To hope that he within the limitless
Ocean engulfed of pure untainted Being,
Should meet my darkened eyesight. In the press

'Of motes through endless light for ever fleeing,
How shall I seize upon that mote was mine,
Ere God with these quick tears consumed my seeing?'

He raised his streaming eyeballs in the shine
Of noonday. Forth Palumba passed, nor spoke
One word to make that silence less divine.

Then came he to a lightning-blasted oak,
Whereby much people gathered. Dwarfed and lame,
Trembling with ague-fit and palsy-stroke,

They mumbling huddled. There were some whom flame
Had seared in withered sinews. Some stretched out
And shook against the skies in impotent blame

Their handless arms. Some stooped or crawled about
On legs wherefrom the feet were lopped. But none
Moved like men perfect in the wormy rout.

Gnashing their teeth, they cursed the impassive sun,
And called on death: 'Dear Death, delicious Death,
Come quickly, for the race we loathe is run!'

Yet Death was leaden-eared, and not a breath
Troubled the ether, though they wailed and moaned
Like men whom dry-eyed fever minisheth.

Sick grew the youth: his very spirit groaned,
Turning from these gaunt mockeries of man,
To gaze on one who ceaselessly entoned

The self-same chant: 'Oh, bitter is the ban!'—
'What ban is bitter, prithee say?'—'Hell take
Thy spirit! I am old. O bitter ban!'

And there was madness like a fiery snake
Writhing in fretted brain-cells: there was pain;
Cancer that on the living limb doth slake

Dry thirst; tetters and secret sores that drain
The blood they poison; hollow coughs, and spasms;
Dropsy, blue gangrene, tumour, boil, and blain.

The sight was horrible. Creeping marasms
Consumed pale quivering victims, and gaunt eyes
Disclosed of dwindling life the sightless chasms.

As one who, vexed with midnight visions, tries
To fling strong arms abroad, then with a start
Awakes at length upon a chill sunrise,

Palumba walked, hugging a frozen smart,
Through the long wards of pain; till death that dies,
Seemed more than sweet to his o'erlaboured heart.

Meanwhile the year waned, and the chalices
From life's frail wreath kept dropping one by one.
A night there was when all the palaces

Of the lake-girdled city like a sun
Sparkled with lamps, over the water-ways
Torch-litten showering live vermilion.

Upon the pictured walls amid the blaze
Of carbuncle and turquoise, solid bosses
Of diamonds, pearl-engirt, shot fiery rays:

Swan's down beneath, with parrot plumage, glosses
Cedar-carved couches on the daïs deep
In bloom of asphodel and meadow mosses.

Here languid men with pleasure tired may sleep:
Here revellers may banquet in the sheen
Of silver cressets: gourds and peaches heap

The citron tables; and a leafy screen,
This way and that with blossoms interlaced,
Winds through the hall in mazèd alleys green.

Palumba with wide eyes those porches paced,
While girls and boys, like moths about a light,
Hovered around his footsteps, fiery-faced.

Shall he drown death in vehement delight?
Sodden sharp fear with drunkenness, or smother
In floods of flaming lust his soul outright?

Oh for the touch of comrade or of brother
To still the tumult in that aching heart!
Sole mid the crowd he strays; nor finds another

To soothe with sympathy the living smart,
That vibrating with most importunate
Anguish, compels him still to walk apart.

The shrill shrieks of the thickening orgy grate
On his strained ears: the tumult swells: the crowd
Through the resounding halls, from gate to gate

Eddying with obscene yell and laughter loud,
Swirls round and round him. Nought is left but flight
Into the arms of cool-enfolding night.

Still in his ears sounded the shout infernal.
Then from the doors he sprang, and downward leaping
Over the porphyry stairs, beheld the eternal

Skies in tranquillity unruffled sleeping.
A million stars over the wilderness
Of heaven with melody unheard were sweeping.

The full moon rising touched those terraces
With level silver, and the aërial shade
Stretched of gigantic palms and cypresses.

Through sombre aisle and solemn colonnade,
Where terebinth and cedar intertwined
Their sable boughs, over the dappled glade

His fleet feet bounded, light as summer wind,
Scarce breaking, though they brushed, the lily-bud :—
So flees o'er forest lawns a hunted hind,

Still through the deep unpeopled chestnut-wood
Hearing an echo of the horn long after
She treads the sanctuaries of solitude.

Even thus the ring of that demoniac laughter
Shrilled in his ears, then fainter grew, then died;
Till with the moonlight through the whispering rafter

Of murmurous trees, he felt a wind that sighed
In silence; and his spirit breathed once more;
And in the twilight Death was sanctified.—

O floods of slumberous shadow! Oceans hoar
With silvery star-beams! From the agony
Of life and light into your depths to soar,

To float and dive in death's immensity,
To commune with the night, where sleep and doom
Like twins are cradled in tranquillity!—

Such was the thought that in the dewy gloom
Descended on his heart like healing balm.
His feet fell softly now: mid bud and bloom,

Far wandering through the immemorial calm
Of those great trees, at last he came to where,
Hollowed beneath one solitary palm,

A porphyry fountain into lucid air
Shot the strong palpitating shaft of spray
Drawn from snow-caverned darkness. High and fair

Uprose the crystal column, misty-grey,
But at its trembling edge transfused with splendour
That seemed a disembodied soul at play.

It was so pure, so murmurously tender,
Tinkling and rippling on the polished stone,
That in its voice the youth could half remember

Some antenatal music faintly blown
Through chambers of his spirit, ere this earth
With tears and smiles had sealed him for her own:

But what was then the cradle-song of birth,
Seemed now death's swan's note; such is music's power
To suit the self-same tones to grief or mirth.

Subdued and tranquillised in that still hour,
Mid ferns he lay and listened; till he thought
That sound and light became one silvery shower.

Then from that melody, so subtly wrought
That what it meant he felt but could not tell,
There grew another song more passion-fraught.

As from a cloud of leaves the fiery bell
Shoots of some crimson lily; as through dreams
Pierces the cry of wakeful Philomel,

What time the eastern and the western beams
Begin to mingle; so the sudden thrill
Of that strange voice rose o'er the silvery streams.

Alone, alone! No sob, no sigh,
Wakes the soul's echo when I cry!
My own heart's voice is all I hear,
Moaning—what hope remains, what cheer
Is left for those who loveless die?

Buds bloom and perish in a day:
But who bewails the rose of May?
Men mourn the great, the wise, the brave,
When they are garnered in the grave;—
Youth unlamented fades away.

Youth's rose, O Love, becomes by thee
A branch of immortality!
Yet if thou pass her by, the breath
Of age more hateful far than death
Scatters her petals! Woe is me!

O Love, in dreams divined, that are
More tender than yon trembling star!
O Love, long sought, long hoped, for whom
Youth waits and weaves her beauty-bloom!
I faint, but feel thee from afar!

Shine forth, strong light of life, my own,
My star, my dream, thou lovely one !
Shine forth, and save me !—Ah, too late !
No voice replies : in vain I wait ;
I weep in vain !—Alone, alone !

It swelled and throbbed, the tranquil night dividing ;
It throbbed and died, drooping its wings of air ;
Died as a meteor into darkness gliding.

But the boy caught the echo : ' Where, O where,
Lone singer, burdened with the selfsame grief
That frets my bosom, lingerest thou ? Thy care

' Is even as mine. A weak and withering leaf
Blown by the wind over life's wildernesses,
Between two waves a momentary waif,

' Am I. Not therefore now the less with kisses
Let us make sweet the little that remains,
Ere we descend to death's unseen abysses !'

He paused. The still night vibrated with strains
That had in them triumph and pain commingled,
Like poisoned wine a desperate lover drains.

The soul of passion in his shrill cry tingled.
Then she who first had sung, no longer stayed
Darkling mid cedar-boughs, but rose, and mingled

Her lips with his. It was a lonely maid,
Who from her comrades like Palumba flying,
Soothed her shy soul with singing in the shade.

Now peace possessed her. On his bosom sighing,
She found the rest she yearned for. Cloudy fleeces
Over the homeless heavens asunder flying,

Meet not more gladly when the wind releases
The strain of storm that kept their paths apart,
Nor of a snapt chain are the broken pieces

Welded more firmly by the goldsmith's art,
Than they who loveless hitherto had wandered,
Each waiting to fulfil the other's heart.

Little he knows of loving who hath slandered
Love at first sight approved by ecstasy,
Yet sure as love whereon the soul hath pondered

Till none dares doubt the authentic deity.
Spirits have voices ; and the cry of sorrow,
Soul unto soul, is surest sympathy.

These lovers therefore had no need to borrow
Assurance from the faith that grows with time ;
It was enough for them that glad to-morrow

Through the translucent air began to climb,
By fiery stairs scaling the orient,
And scattering with a smile night's pearly rime.

Already bold with young love's ravishment
Palumba had laid bare his dreadful story,
Vowing that hours like these made him content

To vanish with the dews of dawn in glory,
That weeks of young-eyed love were heavenlier far
Than the slow years of long life's purgatory.

But she who on his bosom shone a star,
Was womanlike too full of present bliss
To fear a future unfamiliar :

Her eyes on death's invisible abyss
Opened with childlike wonder ; and her spirit,
New fledged from fathomless eternities,

Like dragon-flies that at their birth inherit
The gift of flight, forth on the buoyant air
Of hope, with wings so light they scarcely stir it,

Flew upward from the caverns of despair.—
Here pause, nor seek with loveless lips to sing
Of those swift-gliding summer weeks, that were
Their all of life, their aloe-blossoming.

But when two moons had waxed and waned, and now
His sands of life were counted hour by hour,
Palumba cried: 'From yonder mountain brow

'I fain would see once more the fading flower
Of sunset; ere I too beneath the flood
Sink, and the night descends for evermore.'

It was an hour ere sundown, when they stood
High on the terraced hill-top. Far beneath
Stretched like a still deep lake the cedar-wood,

Ruffling its sombre roofage. Not a breath
Stirred those aërial silences; but glory,
Rippling on velvet crest and vapour-wreath,

Ridged the green sea with sun-gold. Summits hoary
Of vast fire-mountains from their girths of cloud
Shot here and there a glimmering promontory

Up into awful azure; while the loud
Roar of their labouring entrails fitfully
Shook the still air as though the heavens were bowed.

Here stayed Palumba throned imperially
With her he loved, with her through whom his life
Had wakened at a touch to ecstasy.

Deep in his spirit like a stabbing knife
Plunged and replunged the fear:—yon sun is sinking:
To-morrow rises on my mortal strife;

I shall have died while yet the dews are drinking
That fire fresh-kindled; and the child that lies
So softly in my arms, tear-tired and shrinking,

Will learn love's lesson from another's eyes !—
Fierce grew the soul within him : strong and tense
Throbbed all his pulses ; not as one who dies

After long years of dwindling impotence,
But in the hey-day of his passionate bloom,
Full blooded, fiery hearted, with quick sense

And tingling sinews, down death's yawning gloom
Wide-eyed to walk :—it was too terrible !
While thus he gasped, a scarce apparent fume

Rose and o'erspread the landscape like a spell :
Dense grew the air ; earth shuddered ; crash by crash
In distance boomed a muttering thunder-knell.

It roared and gathered volume. Then the flash
Of steel-blue lightning, like a rapier through
The thick mist slithering with a sudden gash,

Dived in the forest. To the zenith flew
Frothed curls of torn clouds, like a Fury's tresses
Entwined with quivering snakes. The slumberous blue

Of heaven through all her aëry wildernesses,
Was flecked and flaked with fire tumultuously
Scattered in restless wreaths and writhed abysses.

Breasting the sunset splendour, whirlingly
On rushed the storm, bearing upon its brow
Rent rainbows : hail and dew deliriously

Tossed into eddying fleeces, veiled the snow
On scarp and toppling bastion: by the gust
Down driven now they swirl, disparted now

They bare the splendour-mantled summits thrust
Into a glare of amber. Deep beneath,
Cedar and cypress in a drift of dust

Crash, clash together, as the tempest's breath
Sweeps o'er their sable plumes. Then all is dark,
Dark as the dreadful brows of coming death.

The storm has reached its fore-appointed mark.
Thunder and falling boughs and whirlwind blast
Merge in a sea sonorous. Not one spark

Illumes the night, save when the glare is cast
Of lightning with live fire circumfluous
Outpoured in livid deluge o'er the waste.

How shall the lovers frail and tremulous
Withstand this wreck of nature? She hath fainted
In the youth's arms. But he victorious,

Like one whom from his birth no fear hath tainted,
Clings to the rock-set cedar tree that tosses
Vext boughs aloft; while from the battlemented

Terrace he marks the forked flame, how it crosses
This way and that in flickering jags the gloom
Deep down above torn woods and yawning fosses.

When the din lulls, he triumphs: 'Reillume
The furnace of thy wrath ; on us let loose
Thy heavens in ruin ; thou dread god, for whom

'I breathe a victim! I am amorous
Of this thine anger. Take us unto thee,
Us two together, tangled in the noose

'Of thine unshunned adorable deity!'
Even as he spoke, the spent clouds summoned thunder;
Then white with lightnings, like a churning sea,

Broke over them. The cedar crashed asunder.
They like the waifs a wild wave flings at will
Over a waste of waters, sank thereunder.

An hour had passed: the sky was dewy-still,
Panting with outpoured passion ; and a star
Dreamed o'er the day's death pale as daffodil.

On the dim west mellowing so faint, so far,
Palumba's eyes first opened: then the fair
Forehead more white than waning lilies are,

Pillowed upon his breast, with tangled hair
And lips half-closed, told that his love was laid
Lifeless beneath death's icy finger there.

He meanwhile lived ; he on whose spirit weighed
Doom swift and certain. Over him the storm
Passing disdainful, on her life had preyed.

Her brows he chafed, her hands, and strove to warm
Those frost-cold lips with kisses. Quick and fierce
The blood of youth pulsed in his perfect form ;

Yet not one drop might be transfused to hers :
Its whole hot human tide, ah me, was due
To-morrow to the god no pity stirs.

And what a morrow ! Aisle and avenue
Throughout the temple-garden tossing up
Steam from their chaliced censers, drank the dew :

Raindrops a-tremble in magnolia cup
And heavy-scented rose, shook silver tears :
Earth seemed to soar and yearning heaven to stoop,

As after quarrel, when each lover fears
The heart he loves more than his own, may keep
Some drop of bitterness for coming years.

Oh, in that moment 'tis so sweet to weep,
To kiss with smiles and tears in swimming eyes,
To draw fresh music out of discord deep !

Who shall gainsay these loves of earth and skies ;
Storm-tumults followed by the halcyon balm
Of reconcilement, when the tired world lies

Bare to the light, and all the heavens are calm ?
So rose the morrow ; each light-winged gale
Soothing the ruffled branches, sighed a psalm.

Palumba scarce had slept. The nightingale
Awake mid quivering branches quick with song,
Leans not her breast against the thorny pale

More mad with memories of ancient wrong,
Than he whose uncompanioned soul with loss
Of friendship, love, and throbbing life is wrung.

It seemed a simple thing to die, to toss
Into the ravening gulf where all must perish,
Manhood and mirth and beaming beauty-gloss :

But in his dedicated heart to cherish
Love for the tomb ; firm-souled and fiery-eyed
To climb, as one who climbs the skies, those garish

Galleries where the gilded gods abide—
That was impossible. Snow-flakes in May
Drooping o'erblown above a sleepy tide,

Are white and wan; whiter, more wan than they,
Was he, with red gold circleted and wreath
Of burning lilies and wrought plumage gay.

The people gathered in the courts beneath;
The clarions sounded; drums and trumpets brayed;
The paths lay deep in flowers; the serpent's teeth

Guarding the steps with dusky gems o'erlaid,
Vomited incense: all the busy earth
Seemed for a joyous festival arrayed.

Yet this for him was Death—blank Death—and Birth
Perchance to what he knew not, none hath known.
Behind him lay the world with all its mirth;

Above him stretched the polished altar-stone,
The fierce-eyed priests, the sharpened flint, the spasm
That sets the soul free with a gurgling groan.

As one who climbs some spirit-quelling chasm,
Where torrents thunder, and the weeds below
Drip like live blood, mid the enthusiasm

Of that hoarse crowd he upward still must go,
Dropping upon the pathway one by one
Opals and pearls and roses with the glow

Of sunset in their rich vermilion.
The lutes wherewith his languor had been soothed
Through those brief months of godhead, on the stone

Were splintered. Briars amid the blossoms, toothed
Like biting asps, made the red life-blood gush
From palms by sandal-wood and cedar smoothed.

The top was reached at last. A breathless hush
Thrilled all the multitude, while he above
Sank on the basalt.—You might hear a thrush

Pouring her soul forth in a song of love.—
Then one sharp shriek.—Then the tumultuous blare
Of trumpets and of shouts that rent the air.

EPILOGUE.

Since none hath come again upon the way
That leads through darkness to the land of light,
What of the perilous journey can we say?—

Nothing.—We watch the frost of sickness blight
Our darlings: in our veins the blood flows weak:
And sleep prepares our soul for endless night.

Were it not well to take our ease, nor seek
An answer to the question all must ask?
Against the bars of pitiless death we break

Those soaring wings, which no ethereal task
Of poet or of sage hath taught to stoop.
Surely 'twere well beneath the sun to bask,

Like flowers to bloom, like flowers to fade and droop,
Drinking the dews of morning and of eve.
Rank after rank the generations troop

Down to the grave. The very rose we weave
Into a garland for the brows we love,
Has blood within it; to the petals cleave

The scent and hues of human clay. Above
Yon mountain tops, what once were tears, distil
In fleecy rain, making the streams whereof

Men drink. Oh cease with weak persistent will
To storm the heights of nature. 'Tis enough
That living, acting, we must breast the hill.

Make the plain ways of life less stern and rough:
Build not cloud-castles in the inconstant air:
Nor strive in vain to cast the viperous slough

Of fate that clings about these limbs so fair.
Kiss the rod rather: learn to face the doom
Which we with all things that have beauty share.

Although we perish, still the roses bloom;
And when our eyes are closed in that long night,
The sun no less his torch will re-illume.

The world we breathe in, is a chrysolite,
No chance, no dreadful drift of dateless days
May tarnish. Those long ages infinite

Which wafted us over unfooted ways,
When from dim whirling vapours sun and earth
And all the spheres that in their cycles blaze,

Grew into being with a gradual birth—
These shall endure, though all men 'neath the sod
Turn a deaf ear alike to grief and mirth.

I know not elsewhere any other God
Than That which permeates the living whole,
Alike in sentient clay and senseless clod.

Call it Power, Motion, Love, Jehovah, Soul.
There is no name for force that over nerve
And granite sweeps with absolute control,

Compelling germs invisible and curve
Of comet to the one resistless law,
Wherefrom the noblest creature cannot swerve,

Nay, nor the meanest. Overmastering awe
Sublimes the soul of man that thinks and feels,
When toward the source of life he never saw,

With genuflection meek he trembling steals,
Divining in the void a Yea and Nay,
Godhood akin to Manhood, which reveals

Beyond the night of death a dawn of day.
Nor blame we man, if mid the weltering sea
That rings him round with impotent dismay,

He crowd those chasms of eternity
With phantoms of his own frail thoughts, and cry
To what seems loftiest in humanity.—

It may be that we shall not surely die:
It may be that the powers to whom we pray,
Are waiting in the calm crystalline sky

To breathe by death these clouds of life away.—
Yet were it wasteful, think you, in the span
Of endless things, that what was once mute clay,

Should for one moment be a vocal man,
Then turn to inarticulate dust again?
Look up. 'Tis night. The ceaseless caravan

Of stars innumerous across the plain
Of heaven, we know not whence, we know not whither,
In long continuous procession strain.

Add glasses to your aching eyes, and wither
The sense of seeing with perpetual toil:
In those faint films a million globes together

Stream onward; deep by deep, the skies recoil;
And all the unpeopled gulfs with suns are rife.
Then ere your spirit falters, trim the oil

In midnight lamps; peruse the hidden life
One drop of water, like a mimic world,
Constrains within its sphere, the throbbing strife,

The palpitating blood-beats. Life is hurled
Hither and thither reckless on the tide
Of Being: yet the basest worm encurled

Within a tortured sinew, hath not died
Save by some dread immutable decree.
Life's continuity no flaws divide,

Nor lapse, nor languor. On the restless sea,
Whereof our souls are waves a little while,
There is no room for Death. It cannot be.—

Here cease: aspire no more: seek not to pile
Dust of delusion on your heart's despair.
Faith, Instinct, Science, Hope, can but beguile

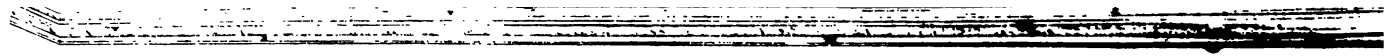
Your ignorance with guesses light as air.—
It may be, is your limit.—Life may be
But Thought, your Thought, the terrible and fair,

Clasping the universe inviolably:
And you, victorious in the overthrow
Of all that clogs and cramps mortality,

May be as God.—Him, knowing not, we know:
Him from the blackness of our self's abyss
We cry to, when the shadows round us grow.—

This hope is yours; but ah, you know not this!

NOTES



NOTES.

The Shepherd to the Evening Star (p. 12).—An obscure myth, told, I think, by Servius in his *Virgilian Commentary*, of the love of Hesper for the Thessalian shepherd Hymenæus, suggested this little poem, which was written near Mentone under the influences of the early spring evenings, so charming in that climate.

For one of Gian Bellini's Little Angels (p. 16).—The figures of winged boys, sitting or standing beneath the throne on which Madonna is seated with her court of saints, holding instruments of music and playing on them, or seeming to wait for her permission to begin, will be familiar to all who know the pictures of Bellini, Carpaccio, and other early Venetian masters.

A Temptation in the Wilderness (p. 17). — I find that few visitors to the Scuola di San Rocco at Venice have noticed the picture by Tintoretto which suggested these lines. It is placed between the large window at the end of the great upper hall, and the door by which one passes into the inner room where hangs the Crucifixion.

The Genius of the Vatican (p. 20).—The statue commonly so called is possibly a Græco-Roman copy of the Heavenly Erôs of Praxiteles. It is terribly mutilated, having lost both arms and both legs. The head is luckily in a comparatively perfect state of preservation, and is exceedingly beautiful and somewhat sad.

The Corpse of Julia (p. 23). — This episode is narrated by more than one contemporary chronicler of Italian affairs, notably by the Roman Stefano Infessura, and is one of the most interesting incidents in the history of the Renaissance. I may direct my readers to the first Chapter of my *Renaissance in Italy*: 'Age of the Despots,' for a reference to the authorities. The only liberty I have taken with the legend, is the addition of such picturesque

circumstances as may not improbably have attended the discovery of Julia's body on the Appian Way, and her translation to the Capitol.

In the Syracusan Stone-Quarries (p. 30).—I have deviated somewhat from the celebrated chapter of Thucydides, describing the sufferings of the Athenian prisoners after the ruin of the Sicilian expedition. He does not say anything about labour having been exacted from their captives by the Syracusans. But as the survivors were sold for slaves, I am, perhaps, sufficiently justified.

The Hêrôon of Philippus (p. 33).—The story of Philippus, the Crotoniate, who followed Dorieus in his Sicilian expedition, and was made a hero by the people of Egesta because of his extraordinary beauty, is told by Herodotus, Book V. 47. I need not say that no vestige of the hero's temple raised to him by his enemies is now extant.

I Tre Felici (p. 47).—The outline of this tale is taken from an episode in the *Orlando Innamorato* of Boiardo. The incident of the magic garden blooming in mid-winter is borrowed from one of Boccaccio's *Novelle*. Boiardo and Boccaccio are the 'masters in the lore of love' mentioned in the prelude. I need not further specify my debt to Boiardo, which is very large, especially as regards the opening of the poem.

Spring Songs (p. 77).—I have attempted in these lyrics to express some of the varied moods and gradations of feeling connected with the approach, advance, and full expansion of the spring. *Song* II., p. 80.—In the West of England it is common to call the wild daffodil by the name of *Lent-lily*, and the white anemone of the woods is *wind-flower*. *Song* IV., p. 84.—The *snow-flake* is a larger and more beautiful sort of snow-drop which grows freely on the eyots of the Thames near Henley.

Callicrates (p. 91).—I have combined two stories told by Herodotus—that of Aristodemus in Book VII. 229, 230, 231, and Book IX. 71; that of Callicrates in Book IX. 72, 85. The link of friendship which I have established between these two historical persons, enabled me to describe some of the Spartan customs, for a more complete explanation of which I may refer my readers to Müller's *Dorians*.

The Lotos-Garland of Antinous (p. 119). — This poem was suggested by the colossal statue of Antinous with the attributes of Dionysus in the Rotondo of the Vatican, his portrait in relief in the

Villa Albani, a passage relating to his death in the *Augustan Histories*, and a passage in Athenæus on the crowns of lotos worn in Egypt at his festival. I have attempted no decided solution of the problem offered by his mysterious death; and though I incline, for artistic purposes, to the tradition of self-sacrifice, rather than to the opposite hypothesis of immolation at the hands of Hadrian, I am aware that his subsequent deification and the extraordinary respect paid to his memory in many parts of the Roman world, may have been prompted by the Emperor's remorse no less than by his gratitude or his affection. It will be remembered by those who have visited Athens, that the Priest of Antinous had a marble seat above the orchestra of the Dionysiac Theatre, among those devoted to gods of a more illustrious lineage and a more venerable worship: while all students of antiquity are aware that the divine honours decreed to this Bithynian slave, stimulated the decaying art of sculpture to produce its last fine flower of almost faultless workmanship. The history of the Empire, rich as it is in motives of romance and mystery, offers nothing stranger or more striking than the obscure life, the doubt-environed doom, and the immediate apotheosis of this court-favourite.

Love and Death (p. 159). — If I remember rightly, both Athenæus in the *Deipnosophistæ* and Plutarch in the *Eroticus*, allude to this tale, quoting it as a well-known instance of the heroic deeds inspired by friendship. It seemed to me more fit for poetic treatment than the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton.

Tema con Variazioni (p. 175).—The Tema for which I made these Variations, Introduction, and Finale, was a little lyric of three stanzas written by a boy, who died soon after its composition. Circumstances have prevented my inserting this; and I have had to fashion for my poem a theme vastly inferior. It is possible that this hint will enable some of my readers to remember the golden verses, for which I had designed a humble setting, and which may still, I hope, some day be given to the world.

The Fall of a Soul (p. 182).—This stanza was suggested by the myth in the Phædrus of Plato, where the human soul is likened to a charioteer driving a pair of horses, and vainly endeavouring to accompany the gods in their triumphant progress through the celestial regions.

In questa Selva Selvaggia (p. 193).—I have placed these sonnets immediately after the little episode borrowed from the Gulistân,

because they are in some sense a reflection upon that sensibility to casual sights and sounds of beauty which Saadi has so exquisitely described. The second sonnet may require this much of explanation: the first line and a half are Jonathan's exclamation [1 Sam. xiv. 43] as rendered in the Vulgate. In line 9, 'harmless venom' is a translation of the words ἀμεμφεῖ ἰῷ used by Pindar for the honey wherewith the snakes fed infant Iamos.

Il Fior degli Eroici Furori (p. 197).—The flower here chosen to be a symbol of Heroic Love is called by botanists, I think, *Saxifraga pyramidalis*. Those who have plucked it in the Pass of Gondo or beneath the ledges of the Morghen in the Val Anzasca, know the perils of its habitat.

An Invocation (p. 204).—The last stanza is a free version of four lines ascribed to Cleanthes.

A Mexican Tale (p. 207).—Prescott in his *Conquest of Mexico*, says that it was a custom of the Aztecs every year to dedicate a young man, selected for his flawless health and beauty, to their god Tezcatlepoca, or World-Spirit. This youth was housed in the temple of the deity, indulged in every pleasure suited to his age, and treated as a representative of the divine being he was destined to propitiate. At the end of twelve months the victim, arrayed in his most splendid robes, and crowned with flowers and feathers, was taken to the teocalli or pyramidal temple, at the top of which stood the god's statue, and was there sacrificed in the usual way by the extraction of his heart from his living body. I have used the short account Prescott gives of this strange custom, as the motive of a poem, the deeper indications of which will be found in the Prologue and Epilogue. The tale itself being but a flower or firefly parable of mortal fate, I have passed but lightly over the chief interests of human life, love, friendship, pleasure, the past, and pain. Though I cannot pretend to have even aimed at historical accuracy in this romance, it may be worth mentioning, first, that the few remaining relics of Mexican poetry reveal a delicate and spiritual sensibility in their singers, secondly that hospitals for the sick were known in ancient Tenochtitlan, and thirdly, that the cities of Yucatan were ruined when the Spaniards first explored those regions.

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